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Lewis

Great stories about show business

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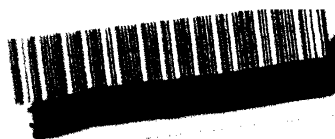
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GREAT STORIES

ABC Γ SHOW
BUSINESS

Edited by JERRY D. LEWIS

Coward-McCann, Inc.
New York

D. LEWIS

MASTER CHOICE

The World's Greatest Poker Stories

*Dedicated with Love and Devotion
to Louise
And Our Three Supporting Players
Dale, David and Dick*

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The Austrian General's wife enters. Austrian General's wife:
General—what a surprise!

You are surprised, you turn, bend over her hand, and kiss it.

You: Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again.

You mix with the officers.

A line under this ended my part.

I had barely spoken the lines a few times when the telephone rang and I was instructed to be at the Belasco for rehearsal at eleven o'clock.

Promptly at eleven, I sat at the edge of the ground cloth of the Belasco. A man came toward me, asked my name, nationality, the place of my birth, and for fifty dollars. He was from Equity and he made me a member.

After the Equity man had congratulated me and gone, another actor introduced me to the members of the company, and then we watched an earnest young man make chalk marks on the floor. He was the stage manager. When he had finished marking he sat down at a table at the side of the stage and opened the typescript of the play. The rehearsal began.

A newly engaged actor came late. He was to play the part of an American journalist, and as he took his coat off he said, "Oh, they're on their feet already." This meant that the rehearsals had progressed far enough for the actors to walk about and speak their lines or read them out of little folders such as I had left at home, for which there is a fine of five dollars. I also learned that "Upstage" is in back of the stage and "Downstage" is in front, nearer the audience.

My friend Anthony from that day on always sat in one of the *fauteuils* in the first row of the orchestra. Behind him sat two men, one in gray flannel slacks, yellow shoes, and a tweed jacket, a long ivory cigarette holder in his teeth. The other man had a mustache. Both had pads and pencils, and most of the time they held their heads sideways in the position in which one admires a rare vase, a good picture, or one's cute child. These two men were the authors.

After we had rehearsed for two hours, Anthony sent out for ham on rye and a paper container of coffee. This was his diet for the next three weeks.

The authors, who came from Hollywood, went to lunch at "21,"

the actors to a cheap lunchroom which seemed always to be directly across the street from the stage door of whatever theater we rehearsed in.

For three weeks we moved from one theater to another, into little and big theaters, theaters with plays in them and empty theaters, and most of the time I sat on a chair in the back of the stage and waited for the third act and my cue.

The chairs and boxes on which I sat were always broken and dirty, it was drafty and dark. Next to me on other broken chairs sat and whispered the other actors, who also waited for their cues.

When the long rehearsals were over, the stage manager called the actors together and said, "All right, you can go now. Be back here at eight o'clock," or, "You can go now. Be back here at eleven tomorrow. That's all."

After the second week's rehearsals were over (there was no pay for the first), the actors all received envelopes with twenty dollars in them. I spoke to one of them about the twenty dollars being very little. He fished the money out of the narrow envelope with two fingers, caressed the bills, folded them carefully after counting the money, and then gave me a curious answer.

"My dear fellow, don't be silly," he said. "This is absolutely marvelous. Why, a few years ago we received nothing for rehearsals—not a penny for five weeks of rehearsals. This"—he unfolded the bills again—"is extremely generous—it's wonderful!"

"Shhhhhh!" said the stage manager.

My confidant, a gentle, precise Englishman, bent closer and whispered, "There was a time, you know, when we had to buy our own costumes—wigs, gloves, and what not. Oh! I must tell you a funny story about a pair of stage gloves, about a pair of lemon-yellow gloves—"

"Quiet, back there!" said the stage manager.

My friend shrank a little and was quiet for a while, then he leaned over again and whispered into my ear, "Years ago, in London, I played opposite a very important actor, comedy of manners, Haymarket Theatre. He played a lord. I was his valet. We had to furnish our own wardrobe. In the second act he called for his gloves, a pair of lemon-yellow gloves. He had to put them on so a lady would recognize him by them. We had a bit of a tiff over these gloves: he insisted that I buy them; I said it was he who

should, because he wore them. He pointed to the script where was written, 'Valet enters with gloves in his right hand, hands them to Lord, who puts them on.'

"'You can't come on without them,' he said, 'so you must buy them.'

"He absolutely refused to do so himself. And, mind you, he was drawing twice my salary.

"Came opening night, and I taught him a lesson, the bounder! Last minute before curtain time I ran out to a fruiterer's, bought three bananas, peeled them carefully, and hung the skins out of my right hand. From out there, they looked more like gloves than real gloves. When he called, 'Jarvis, my gloves—my lemon-yellow gloves!' I handed him the peels, hü, hü, hü!"

"Shhh! Quiet back there!"

"Cured him," added my friend almost inaudibly, as if under the protective bedcovers of a nursery.

A few days before the opening of our anti-Nazi play we started to rehearse the third act. I walked up and down in the wings and tried my lines.

"Dear lady, what a surprise!"—no—"Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again."

My cue came, I marched in, saluted, looked surprised, bent to kiss her hand, kissed it, and said, "Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again." With my most elegant gesture I pulled a chair that stood a little to the right for the lady to sit down on.

The play stopped the moment I touched the chair. The stage manager ran in from the wings. He stuttered, waved in the air with both hands, and when he had found his breath, yelled, "For God's sake don't touch that chair! Don't ever move that chair again! Don't move anything! You'll throw the whole play out of gear." He took the chair back again and carefully placed it on its chalk marks.

The actors looked at one another and shook their heads, in an oratorio of surprise, shock, and pity. The authors had come down out of their second-row chairs, leaned over the footlights like two worried mothers watching a child drown. Anthony shook his head and looked at his watch. The stage manager wiped his head and said, "All right now, that's all. You can go now. Be back at three o'clock."

After everyone had left, the famous actress who played the lead,

the role of the Austrian General's wife, smiled, walked toward me, took my arm, and said, "Look, dear, watch me carefully, slowly repeat after me, 'I am delighted to see you, dear lady'—or how does it go again?" I told her, "Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again."

She said it for me once more, effortless as music. As liquid pearls on a string the words came from her lips. It was a superb reading of my part and I repeated it after her three times. "That's much better," she said.

"Now look, darling," she said in consoling tones, "never, never, never move anything on any stage. That, my dear, is the first thing for you to remember. Secondly, don't twitch, don't dance, don't wiggle or move, don't start talking, until I have crossed over to your side. Acting is timing.

"Don't mind this, dear, but I feel someone must tell you this. You see, the audience out there, they are like little children. If you move a finger, they take their eyes from me to your hand. They want to see what you are going to do next, and I might as well not be on the stage. It kills my lines.

"Just now, when we rehearsed it, you walked on my lines, dear. Watch your timing. Now let's try it again."

Anthony, wrapped in his overcoat, sat out in the audience with his ham on rye and his nose in the container of coffee.

"Oh, another thing," said my mentor, "don't ever play with your back to the audience—don't ever!"

We tried it again.

"Oh, General—what a surprise!"

I turned and looked surprised. She walked across the stage, lithe and free as Le Gallienne in *The Swan*. I bent over her hand and kissed it, counted to five, and said, "Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again."

"You see," she said, "it's very simple."

We went out to celebrate the simplicity with lunch at the Algonquin and even sat at a table next to George Jean Nathan's. At three o'clock we went to another theater to continue rehearsals.

The stage manager made chalk marks on the floor, the authors came backstage, and the one with the cigarette holder asked me to step aside with him. The other author waited in the gangway. One was to my left, the other to my right.

"They'll never hear you out there. Louder, much louder," said

the one with the hunting jacket. "You're a general, see? You're the big cheese. When you come on like this, see, with your chest out, you walk in as if you owned the place. They're all scum as far as you are concerned—a lot of weaklings. You're taking the place over, you're headman. Know what I mean?"

"More schmaltz," the other said.

"But you're also a gentleman," added the first, "so when you see her, you kinda drop the military air a little. You're surprised, like this, pleasantly, but not too friendly." The author showed me on his face how a German general is pleasantly surprised. Both of them stood aside to let me try it.

"Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again." I did it with gestures and pantomime.

Both of them shook their heads and looked worried, and one said, "I don't think he was cut out to be a German general. Too soft." Turning to me, he added, "Not Prussian enough, and you haven't the right accent. Try it this way: 'Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again.'" He screamed in the accents and voice of Lew Lehr of the newsreels.

They both escorted me to the ladies' room. An electrician was called to turn the lights on and I was left to practice. I had several visitors during the rest of the afternoon. The authors came twice and said, "Much better." The famous actress came and said, "Remember the timing." The Englishman with the yellow-glove story came and said, "I hope you don't mind, but I feel I must tell you this: when you speak your lines, look at her face, not at her navel. Otherwise your words will drop on the floor—blup, blup, blup—and die there." Last of all, Anthony came: "Louder, still louder! You have to project yourself. You'll never get across. They won't hear a word in the fourth row."

After the stage manager had dismissed us that night, I took a bus. I must have said loudly, "Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again," because everybody looked at me and the woman next to me said, "Why, I have never seen you before!"

I excused myself, explained that I was an actor going over my part. The woman got up and went to another seat.

The next day we moved to the theater in which we were to appear. The scenery was up. In the flies above hung the scenery of another anti-Nazi play that had folded up there a few days ago.

"You can have it for two bucks," said the stage-door watchman; and he added that the producers of that play had not enough money left to have the scenery carted away.

Our theater had been rented out to a theatrical society from the Bronx who had bought out the house for a preview that night. In the dressing room which I shared with my colonel hung my uniform—a splendid garment, its breeches bearing the wide, carmine stripes of the general staff, the coat laden with the Iron Cross first, second, and third class, and the order Pour le Mérite. There was an exquisite pair of boots and an elaborate cavalry saber with golden belt and chased buckle. Over all I wore a cape weighted down by a sable collar four feet wide. My colonel was only slightly less magnificent; his cape had a mink collar one foot wide.

All day the first and second acts were rehearsed, the actors were let go one hour sooner, at six, and we were back at eight to make up and dress.

My colonel hung up his street clothes, took off his old shoes, and, sitting in his underwear, showed me how to smear grease paint over a layer of cold cream. He himself used olive oil out of a small bottle for a base because, he said, it lasted longer and was cheaper and if the play closed you could make salad dressing out of it, or use it to cook. He showed me how to put blue shadows over and under my eyes, and finally he traced my eyelids with an eyebrow pencil so worn down that he had to hold it between his fingernails.

We helped each other button up the tight uniform collar, slip on the boots, and tighten belt and spurs. Then we went down and stood in the wings to watch the first two acts.

Everybody wished everyone else good luck. The slim German girl who played the heroine spat three times—toi, toi, toi!—on my sable collar, the Continental actors' way of wishing good luck. She also said, "*Hals und Beinbruch!*"—a phrase that skiers and acrobats shout to each other as they go up into the snowfields or to their trapezes.

The curtain was still down. Outside was a humming sound like a swarm of bees flying past, a dangerous noise punctuated by the sound of seats being pushed down and the rustling of programs.

The stage manager said, "All right, first act." The actors walked on the stage. For most of that act the American journalist had to hide in a telephone booth and spy. The actor who played that part

went into the booth and closed the door. My colonel leaned down and whispered, "Poor fellow! It's all right now, but it will be hell in there next summer." The curtain went up, the play was on.

The first two acts went by, the third act and my cue came on with the speed of a car that is going to run you over. My feet and legs left me, my mouth was filled with cotton, and I repeated over and over, "Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again—don't touch that chair, don't wiggle, you're the big cheese, timing, don't walk on her lines—Dear lady—" The gentle Englishman squeezed my hand and said: "Go out there and give it to them!" Then came the cue: "His Excellency Graf Ottokar von Sporentritt zu Donnersberg, Commanding General of the Garde Grenadier Regiment zu Fuss Nummer Eins!"

Somehow I was on the stage, saluted, kissed her hand, "Dear lady, I am delighted to see you again—"

But it would not have mattered what I said. From the moment I came on, the audience hissed, booed, and stamped their feet.

We had never had time to rehearse what I was to do after I had said my lines. I said them in the center of the scene, almost at the footlights, and I would have remained there, but for my English friend. He came and took my arm with a patrolman's determined grip and said something about going out into the garden, because the audience had just begun to listen again, and he carted me to the back of the stage and out.

"You walked on my lines again, dear," said the actress, wagging a finger. "And, darling, on opening night please don't wiggle that sword. You'll ruin everything. Everything depends on you in this scene."

I went home. I could hardly speak. I had shouted myself hoarse. The next morning I had a fever, but I thought, "The play must go on!" and went to gargle and took some quinine, until I read in the *Times* that I had laryngitis and that another actor would take my place and play the General at twenty-four hours' notice.

That evening, like a murderer to his victim's burial, was I drawn to opening night, to hear another man say, "Dear lady." He did it very well, with perfect timing, without walking on her lines or wiggling his sword.

After the show, I went backstage. The famous actress put her hand on my shoulder. "But I tried to tell you how to play it, dear," she said.

The press agent said, "You shouldn't hang around here. You should be in bed, for Christ's sake." And he added, "What the hell you care? Be glad you're out of it. It's a flop. This is a coffin, this theater. Anybody wants to be an actor is nuts."

The play lasted one night.

When it was over and the audience had left, I looked for Anthony. He sat in the last row of the orchestra in his old coat—cold and alone, like a wet mouse. He has the theater for an illness. With his eyes closed, he smiled his wide grimace and said, "I guess I'll have to look for another play."

The authors had left, one for Jersey, to shoot pheasants, the other for Hollywood. They had not said good-by, even to Anthony.

Up in our dressing-room my colonel, who had worried a little while ago about the summer's heat in the telephone booth, packed up, put on shoes with their heels worn off. His threadbare coat hanging from his shoulders, he stuffed the little bottle half full of olive oil, the eyebrow pencil stub, his dirty powder puff, and the rest of his make-up into a battered biscuit tin and then walked out.

On the dressing table we had shared was an envelope, torn open with his name on it. Some figures were written on the back of it. It was the twenty dollars for the last week's rehearsal, and deducted from it was the cost of two tickets for opening night, seven dollars. That left him thirteen dollars.

LOVE IN HOLLYWOOD



Robert Benchley

THE SEEMING prevalence of divorce in Hollywood may be explained away by the fact that Hollywood divorces rate more publicity than any others, and so just seem more prevalent. But this does not explain why people in the movie colony can't get engaged, married or divorced without putting on a routine. You would think

that they were smuggling opium into the country, the way they duck back and forth.

Nobody in Hollywood ever just goes and gets married, the way people do in other parts of the country. They never even get engaged. It takes at least six months for the male to circle around the female and dart away again, like polyps or Japanese sand-fish. It must be the climate.

Let us say that Norman LeRoy and Maida Marston work together in a picture and, what with the heat of the lights and the necessity for re-takes, find that they are in love with each other. There certainly is no harm in that. Well, there is harm in it, but it's done all over the world, and with much more directness. Joe Doaks and Meridian Blevitch, of Utica, N. Y., fall in love, too.

As is customary under such circumstances, Norman LeRoy and Maida Marston see a lot of each other at the Cocoanut Grove and other public places; for, after all, that's the whole idea of liking someone, isn't it? They are seen dancing together, eating together and, if you happen out on the porch suddenly, necking together. This, my spies tell me, is only what goes on everywhere.

But, when confronted with the evidence, Miss Marston says: "I like Norman very much, but we are just good friends." And Norman says: "I never heard of Miss Marston, except professionally." This goes on for a few weeks, and they become engaged to be married.

Now, becoming engaged to be married has, with the broadening of our standards, been accepted as quite *au fait*. It is even the conventional thing to do. But Mr. LeRoy and Miss Marston shun the reputation for it as they would the reputation of being lepers. When discovered at Palm Beach together, Miss Marston says: "Of course, I am very fond of Mr. LeRoy, but we are just good friends." And Mr. LeRoy says: "Who? Miss Marston? Never heard of her—except, of course, professionally."

Eventually, as so often happens in cases of engagement, they get married. A mistake, perhaps, but who can cast even the second stone? So, when they are man and wife, Mr. LeRoy takes up his legal residence at the Hollywood Athletic Club and Miss Marston goes to her mother's. And, when confronted with the City Clerk's ledger and the minister's day-book, Mr. LeRoy says: "I am flying today to New York, where I am taking up sword-fishing. I have only the best wishes for Miss Marston, of whom I have never

heard." And Miss Marston says: "Business calls me today to New Rochelle, N. Y. I am flying, but I had no idea that Mr. LeRoy was going to be on the same plane. We are just good friends."

They are such good friends that, in their own good time, they have a baby. This is a rather difficult spot. "I do know Miss Marston," admits Mr. LeRoy, "and I have a great admiration for her work."

And Miss Marston, holding the baby up to the camera so as to get a long-shot of the baby and a close-up of herself, says: "I am terribly fond of Norman, but there is nothing in this talk of our engagement. We are just good friends."

And the first that we really hear of the marriage is when they are divorced. Perhaps this is why Hollywood divorces get so much publicity. It's the first time the couple has broken down and admitted being married.

OUTSIDE AND INSIDE



Arnold Bennett

I

THE EVENTS recounted in the following recital had two sides, the outside and the inside, which must be displayed separately.

The outside was seen by Mr. Telfer. Mr. Telfer had nothing whatever to do with the affair, save as a spectator of the outside of it. Many other persons, like Mr. Telfer, saw the outside without seeing the least bit of the inside; and from among them I have chosen Mr. Telfer by sheer chance.

Mr. Telfer was a quiet, simple, regular man, and a great authority on the times and the speeds of the trains to Surbiton, which trains to and fro he would catch daily with practiced skill, by thirty seconds or so. Since he lived at Surbiton he seldom went to the theatre in London, because he did not care for being up late

of a night. Nightly he played patience, occasionally cheating himself, and drank two whiskies-and-soda during the exciting progress of the game. But one day a friend of his in the city, an official of a trust company whose tentacles wound themselves about nearly everything in London, said to him at lunch:

"Look here, Telfer my lad. It's the first night of *Twelfth Night* at the Eden Theatre tonight. I've got a stall and now I can't use it. Do you care to go?"

Mr. Telfer cared.

He took an unusual train to Surbiton, dressed, etc., glanced at his Shakespere, and came back to town for the performance. He had frequently read in the descriptive press gorgeous accounts of the social and artistic glories of theatrical first nights, but he had never attended a first night. Seldom indeed had he ever sat in the stalls. (When he went the pace, he treated himself and a companion to the dress-circle—and no more.) Hence he was excited and very pleasurably filled with fine anticipations.

As his taxi drove up to the portals of the Eden (he was doing the thing in style as his ticket had cost him naught), he saw the façade of the theatre inflamed with the following electrical sign: *Aida Jenkinson in "Twelfth Night."* He had never heard of Aida Jenkinson till that day.

With others of the mighty and the exalted he passed between two rows of gapers into the theatre. And he saw everywhere in the entrance-hall boards inscribed thus: MR. ASPREY CHOWN [large] presents MISS AIDA JENKINSON [enormous] in "Twelfth Night" [moderate] by William Shakspere [very small], together with the portrait of a rather handsome and dashing dame. Elsewhere it was announced that Aida Jenkinson would sustain the role of Viola, the innocent girl who for adventure's sake disguised herself as a young man.

The auditorium was soon full. Everybody in the stalls seemed to know everybody in the stalls—except Mr. Telfer, who was left lonely and so had opportunity to wonder at large who was who. The band played. The lights went down, and the curtain went up on the magnificence of Orsino's palace, and after a short scene a cloth descended to represent the seacoast, and three sailors and Viola herself entered, to a terrific roar of welcome from enthusiasts in the gallery. Mr. Telfer could not understand how they recognised

Miss Jenkinson so quickly, for to his eyes she bore scarcely any resemblance to her portraits in the foyer. Miss Jenkinson stepped right out of her part and effulgently acknowledged the roar. At this stage she was still dressed as a woman, in an enveloping cloak and a hood over her head. Perhaps the cloak gave a false amplitude to her figure, but the cloak could not account for Viola's crimson cheeks and rich rubious lips, so odd in a young woman who had just escaped from a shipwreck.

"What country, friends, is this?" she began in a powerful, contralto voice, the voice of a mature experience accustomed to command. Ill-mannered individuals in the stalls smiled at one another. She announced imperatively to the sailors that she would be a man and serve Duke Orsino, and that the sailors must help her, and the sailors agreed quickly, without argument, and she made her exit, and the cloth rose on Olivia's house, wherein ageless characters, Sir Toby Belch, Andrew Aguecheek and Maria, indulged in dazzling farce to shouts of applauding laughter.

The next scene was Orsino's palace once more. It was empty. It remained empty. Murmurs began in the stalls, in all parts of the theatre; they increased to a hum of conversation. Hours seemed to pass, but probably not more than a minute passed.

Then a hidden voice said "Lower! Lower!" and the curtain fell, and a gentleman, beautifully clad in evening dress, stepped in front of it and said:

"Kind friends. I deeply regret to inform you that Miss Aida Jenkinson has had a sudden indisposition and cannot possibly act tonight. She begs me to express to you her profound sorrow, together with her apologies. All monies paid for seats will be returned at the box-office." The speaker bowed, vanished. The band played "God Save the King."

An absolutely unique sensation in London theatrical life! The audience could not believe its eyes and ears. Mr. Telfer, among others, was disappointed, and yet at the same time he was pleased and made proud by the thought that *he* had assisted at this absolutely unique sensation. He was sorry that, as his stall had been "complimentary," he could not demand twelve shillings for it at the box-office. The electrical sign was still brightly blazing on the façade when Mr. Telfer, with the rest of the amazed, staggered, and chattering audience, got into the street. It was barely half past

eight. The automobiles had been dismissed till eleven o'clock, and there were no taxis except such as came up with late arrivals. The mighty and the exalted had to get home as best they could.

The next morning Mr. Telfer examined his newspaper with extraordinary interest, expecting to see columns about the Eden Theatre matter. But he found only a miserable two inches, saying baldly that Miss Aida Jenkinson had suffered a serious indisposition at a critical moment, and that it was understood that the show would be postponed. (The show, however, was not postponed—it was totally suppressed.) Mr. Telfer had a very agreeable day at the office. He was of course the only man in the office who had witnessed the absolutely unique sensation.

Such was the outside of the event.

2

Now for the inside.

Mr. Asprey Chown, justly reputed to be the greatest showman in England, had his ups and downs, his years when he bought precious stones (of which he was a collector) for choice, and his years when he sold them from necessity; and he had been rather glad of the opportunity to "present" Aida Jenkinson as Viola in Shakspeare's *Twelfth Night*. (Not that he in fact did present her. She very much presented herself.) He had experienced two devastating failures at the Eden Theatre, and he could put his hand on no spectacle to follow them with a prospect of success. Moreover the Eden was eating its head off more than forty horses in forty stables. Mr. Asprey Chown was paying £315 a week rent for the Eden on a longish lease, and its market value for short tenancies was anything between £400 and £450 a week. Aida Jenkinson contracted to pay him £475 a week for three months certain, at the same time leaving him nominally at the head of the establishment. Further she accepted the whole of the financial risks of the enterprise and she gave him ample security for her prospective liabilities. She had the reputation of being closefisted, but in the transaction with the imperial Asprey Chown she certainly showed no sign of this quality. True, the unique Chown had qualms about the effect of the affair on his artistic prestige; but, being a very clever and ingenious person, he adopted the wise course of treating it to his acquaintances and business connections as something in the nature

of a great and original lark—as something which nobody but he would ever have dreamed of doing. And after all Aida Jenkinson was no ordinary woman, and assuredly no ordinary actress.

When some varieties of actress get into the newspapers apropos of activities other than their professional activities, it generally appears that they are the offspring of tobacconists. Aida, however, was the daughter of a strictly Christian master-chimneysweep, in Poplar. From the first there could have been no misapprehension as to her vocation. She was very obviously born for the stage. At sixteen, already fully developed, she topped an amateur dramatic society in Shoreditch. Some people were misguided enough to jeer at her; they even attended performances of the Society for the sole purpose of laughing. But at eighteen she had squeezed herself into a touring company devoted to full-throated melodrama. At nineteen she was playing leads in such pieces as *The Wronged Wife*, *Human Hearts*, *The Long Lane*, *What Men Pay For*, and *The Lone Girl*. Her salary rose and rose. She saved. She made an unhappy marriage, lost both her husband and her money, and saved again, alone. She passed a year in America.

At twenty-three she had her own company, to which she paid almost nothing a week—and an extraordinary company it was. Aida did not demand talent, nor youth, nor beauty. She was ready to supply, unaided, all the talent, all the youth, all the beauty. What she wanted and demanded was the spotlight and the centre of the stage. There were still misguided people who laughed at her, who asserted that she was dreadful to the point of side-splittingness, and who regarded her posters, in which innocence was always depicted in situations of extreme danger or dazzling triumph, as the final word in chromographic vulgarity. But in the first place Aida never noticed or heard of these people. And in the second place, even if she had learnt of their existence, she would not have cared. Aida might be just what you pleased, but she delighted the public. Managers of provincial theatres worshipped her as an idol. When she got to stage-doors an hour before the performance she always saw queues of the public waiting patiently but ardently for the privilege of paying money to see her. In auditoriums she seldom saw an empty seat. She never came on to the stage, and never went off it, without exciting her audience to roars of applause.

Of course her audiences did not consist exclusively of university

professors and leaders of society. Her audiences might be fairly described as "popular." But they had the three greatest qualities that an audience can have: they paid, they applauded deafeningly, they came again. Aida's share of the week's takings in "No. 1" towns frequently amounted to a thousand pounds, and since her company and her entire expenses cost her far, far less than four hundred pounds a week, it will be seen that she contrived to live and keep her head above water.

Thus she went round and round the country, year in year out, growing richer and richer, eternally gorged, but never sated, with adulation and success, and more and more deeply convinced of the unquestionable truth that there was only one Aida Jenkinson.

But we are rarely what we ought to be. Aida ought to have been content, and she was not. A worm had insinuated itself into the rose of her happiness and was gnawing at its heart. The worm was not the desire for love. No! She had had one love affair and wanted no more. And the worm was not another phrase for the finger of time. For Aida, Aida was changeless. Nobody ever happened to mention to her that twenty years are twenty years, and as for twenty-five years being twenty-five years—well, I should hope not. On the contrary all her employes, all those with whom she did business, conspired to prove to her that twenty-five years were less than one day in their sight; in other words, that she was not a day older, not a day less slim, not a day more mature than in Victoria's reign. She believed the tale. And so mighty is the power of auto-suggestion supported by hetero-suggestion, that it conquered even her mirror.

The worm indeed was not a worm in the rose of her happiness. Better to say that it was an adder which she nourished in her rich bosom. The adder of ambition! The ambition to play and to triumph in the West End of London. She had never played in London. Somehow she had boggled at London. She had announced that she despised London. The statement was inexact. She felt night and day that her life could not be complete without London. Once in America, where she courageously took what she could get, she had played Maria in *Twelfth Night* in a one-night-stand "legitimate" troupe. And thenceforward she had longed to play Viola. Thenceforward she had "seen herself" as Viola. And now she had the wondrous, intoxicating notion of playing Viola in London. She met Mr. Asprey Chown in a hotel in Birmingham. Mr. Asprey

Chown, to her as to all successful ladies, was very gallant, as they pronounce it in the Midlands and the North. The contract for a season at the Eden Theatre ensued.

And Mr. Asprey Chown very soon began to regret the contract. That is to say, he did not regret the financial side of it, but he regretted the other side, the side which would affect, perhaps disastrously, his prestige with the West Enders who think that they know what is what and who is who. Mr. Asprey Chown's own rather artistic show was quickly dying in the last performances in the evenings, and in the daytime Aida was rehearsing the Jenkinsonian version of *Twelfth Night*. Mr. Asprey Chown, having had tidings of the nature of the rehearsals, remained inside the manager's room which he had specially excepted from the tenancy to Aida.

The invisible man had a series of shocks. In the first place there was the cast. There was, for example, the part of Olivia, youthful, lovely, and ardent princess, the second most important female rôle in the play, the enchanting girl who had inspired Duke Orsino with a passion that amounted to madness. Aida gave the part to Emily Fantour. Emily was indeed a Shakspearean actress. Her name was known to experienced playgoers and had been printed on many bills. But she was also a grandmother. Mr. Asprey Chown remembered her from his boyhood, and it might be said, of her prime, that there were giantesses in her day. Aida offered her eight pounds a week, and she eagerly closed. The ladies of Olivia's court all had similar physical qualities. They dwarfed Aida, which in itself was a feat. They rendered Aida by comparison girlish—another feat. The men whom Aida selected were younger and slimmer, save Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, who might well have been the monument on which Patience sat.

The next shock was Aida's choice of a producer. Mr. Cyril Blenkhorn, an honourable name in the annals of the Shakspearean stage, had played with Barry Sullivan, Osmond Tearle, and Henry Irving. Aida seemed to have raised him from the dead, and he was a funnier caricature of a tragedian than any caricature of a tragedian that Phil May ever drew.

The third shock was the way in which Aida treated Shakspeare and her producer. Aida was a businesswoman who knew exactly what she wanted. She wanted everything. She wanted the centre of the stage and the front of the stage, and she wanted them all

the time. She wanted the audience to see Aida's face and to see the face of nobody else. She wanted to get all the tears and all the laughs. She wanted all the effective lines. She cut all the other parts with mighty shears. In the duel scene with Toby Belch and his fellow-clowns she reduced the clowns to naught and with difficulty prevented herself from killing Andrew Aguecheek dead at the first thrust. Instead of being page to the Duke Orsino she put on an air signifying that the Duke was page to her. It was all very wonderful. Blenkhorn even came along one day with a cutting from an old criticism by the great Victorian dramatic critic, Clement Scott, which said that *Twelfth Night* ought to be "drenched and drowned" in Viola. Aida gave Blenkhorn a dinner for that discovery, and subsequently quoted it at every turn. Not that she needed any moral aid. She had learnt ruthlessness at rehearsals in America, and besides had a natural instinct to be tyrannic. She was capable of saying anything, and saying it continuously. The company obtained new aspects of the glorious resources of the English language. Also the company soon perceived the value of silence, acquiescence and submission.

The next shock was the manner in which Aida delivered Shakspeare's verse, and in which Blenkhorn caused the other players to deliver it. As it issued from Aida's rubious lips no one could imagine for a moment that it was blank. She gave it forth like thunder, like lightning, like shells from a twelve-inch gun, like thick clouds of vapour, like midnight motor-buses thundering through deserted thoroughfares. Curiously she never addressed any of it to the other characters in the play; it was all directed straight into the auditorium where the packed audiences were to be. She did not make vicarious love to Olivia, she made it to the audiences. She did not swear allegiance to the Duke, she swore it to the audiences. But she did quarrel with Antonio—and did not quarrel with the audiences!

Every syllable was heard, every consonant, every vowel. It was all more than wonderful.

"Why don't you come down to one of my rehearsals, Asprey dear?" she asked Mr. Chown. (She called everybody by his or her Christian name.)

"I should love to," answered Mr. Chown, "but I'm so devilish busy. I will when I've time. I'm dying to see your methods."

The next and possibly the master-shock occurred when, the

rehearsals having advanced somewhat, Aida, ever workwomanlike, appeared one morning in a costume which gave her freedom for action as the Duke's page.

The assistant stage-manager went up to Mr. Asprey Chown's room:

"She's in knickers!"

Mr. Asprey Chown stole across into the flies and surreptitiously gazed down.

"My God!" he murmured under his breath. "My God!"

And Aida went on, absorbed in her splendid part, absorbed in the fulfilment of her ambition, dreaming of grand triumphs, convinced that for her time did not exist, and now and then secretly reproaching herself for having chosen two mature players as a foil when really there had been no need to do so.

One day her beautiful dreams were ever so slightly disturbed by a trifling incident. She was making love, on behalf of the Duke, to the grandmotherly Olivia in her rapt, ecstatic, audible manner, and saying what she would do if she herself, the page, were in love with Olivia.

"'Build me a willow cabin at your gate,'" she crooned, lost in Shakspercan emotion.

"Some cabin!" came a low voice from the wings.

Or seemed to come, for surely it could not have been a real voice; surely it was a delusion of Aida's fancy! She walked majestically to the side, and two members of the company simultaneously choked. Aida saw no out but Mr. Cleeby, the chief electrician, kneeling, engaged in some little job of re-wiring. He hummed quietly to himself. Aida hesitated.

"Please don't hum," she said, with majesty.

Mr. Cleeby, a stoutish, middle-aged man in creased clothes, turned as if startled and gazed at her blandly.

"Right you are, miss," he replied.

3

The dress-rehearsal arrived. Mr. Cyril Blenkhorn, with flowing white hair and a scarf in the Barry Sullivan manner thrown picturesquely over one shoulder, sat solitary in the stalls. Twenty or thirty people—paragraph-writers, a critic or so, photographers, friends of the players—were scattered in the dress-circle, and they were joined from time to time by such of the players as were

temporarily not occupied on the stage. Mr. Asprey Chown had expressed his deep regret to Miss Aida Jenkinson that he could not be present. Nevertheless he was secretly present, hidden neatly behind a curtain in an upper box. He was drawn to the dress-rehearsal by a terrible and a sinister fascination. He felt that he must know the worst. He soon knew it. Aida, strutting in stockings and gaiters and knee-breeches as a page specifically described by Shakspeare as something older than a boy and younger than a man, made an unprecedented, a unique spectacle, which was rendered worse by her tremendous and impassioned earnestness. The great scene between the fading provincial star as a youth and the grandmotherly Emily Fantour as a tender and young princess became pathetic, farcical, tragic.

At any rate Aida dominated the stage, and she dominated it in the full glare of attendant beams of light, which left nothing of her features or her form to Mr. Chown's imagination. Her powerful voice threw out the lines like a string of sausages from a sausage machine. And clearly she was very content with herself; clearly she foresaw triumph.

The worst was so much worse than anything previously conceived by Mr. Chown that he honestly wished he had never seen a theatre in his life—indeed he had a passing fancy for the grave beneath the sod. What irked him to the point of exasperation was those four words on the bills, "Mr. Asprey Chown presents." They frightened him more even than Aida's immense coloured posters in the style of cinema publicity. And he was helpless, he could not erase the words, for Aida under the contract had full control of all advertising.

Aida made her entrances and her exits, and not a sound was heard from the darkness of the auditorium. But after the first clowning scene, during which Aida was "off," came a little timid applause, such as is not unknown at dress-rehearsals.

At the end of the act Mr. Chown decided to depart, lest some calamity might happen to him; and on his way down he met Sebastian, Viola's double, and told him that his green coat was too full and ought to be taken in. And while passing the prompter's corner he heard Aida indicating extensive cuts in the clowning scenes.

"Don't you hear me, stupid? Cut *all* that, I tell you, and get hold

of the parts and put the cuts in before any one leaves tonight. Let them rehearse it tomorrow morning."

Mr. Chown stepped on tip-toe dolorously into the street. He could stand no more. He knew nothing of the photograph-call after the rehearsal, and was not aware that the photographers were commanded to portray Aida alone in eleven poses, and the whole company, with Aida most prominently in the midst, in only one pose. He was not aware that finally Aida said to Mr. Cleeby:

"Cleeby, we're going to have another lighting rehearsal now."

And that she kept the entire staff up till five o'clock the next morning.

Nor was he aware that throughout the night Mr. Cleeby, one of the greatest exemplars of self-control in the history of the British stage, addressed no remark to Aida beyond "Yes, miss," "No, miss," "It's your stage, miss," "It's all one to me, miss," "I'm here to do as I'm told, miss." Nor was he aware that at the close of the proceedings Mr. Cleeby went to a public-house off Fleet Street, specially licensed to keep open for the entertainment of newspaper hands, and informed the bar that Aida was a rare fine bit o' stuff, though long in the tooth, and that she could what *he* called act, but that if she tried to come it over him one single inch the next night he would positively do her in, let her be as athletical and as tyrannical as she might. Four hours after this solemn announcement of Mr. Cleeby's intentions, Mr. Asprey Chown, with a bursting heart, fled to Paris. He was not aware, either, that heaven was watching over him and that he himself had quite unintentionally set in motion the strange sequence of tiny events which heaven would use for his salvation.

On "the night," in her first scene, in which she appeared as the girl Viola, Miss Jenkinson was received with shouting applause chiefly from the gallery but extending also somewhat through the circles down to the stalls. Her exit from that scene, however, was accompanied by silence in the auditorium.

Beneath her large, loose cloak she wore all her male attire except the tight-fitting green coat. There was ample time to throw off the cloak and don the coat before the beginning of her next scene, and she filled most of the interval by a number of sternly whispered commands and recommendations to various individuals in the complicated human machine by which a play gets itself presented. She had never done giving orders. Her dresser waited in the wings

with the coat. Aida flung away the cloak and offered her tremendous shoulders for the coat, which the dresser put on. Aida pulled it together at the front, and failed to make the sides meet. The intermediate scene was ending. She could not understand what had happened to the coat—or in the alternative what had happened to herself. In her impatience she simply forced the garment with one tug to meet in front. A horrid tearing sound was heard. She had ripped the back seam nearly from top to bottom. The garment now met in front but not behind.

The situation was appalling, as much in itself as in the mighty speechless fury of the star. Everybody in her vicinity seemed to be spellbound with fear, mesmerised, petrified! Seconds were hours. . . .

Then it was that Mr. Telfer had seen the curtain descend.

With the thick curtain between herself and the audience, Aida found her tongue. She raged up and down amid the riven fragments of her ambition to entrance the West End as Viola. She knew that she could not start again the next night, or the next week, and that the coat could not possibly be repaired for any continuation of the performance the same night. Indeed she tore the coat to pieces in the presence of her trembling company and staff. She had worked in vain; she had bullied in vain; she had studied in vain. In these moments she really was a mere girl in her broken and volcanic heart.

Mrs. Pumper, the wardrobe mistress, approached her, though Aida had not sent for her. Mrs. Pumper was fascinated by horror into attendance at her own execution.

At the sight of her Aida ceased to rage, and said with fearful contralto calm:

"That coat fitted like a glove last night."

She waited.

Mrs. Pumper gazed affrightened at the impressive figure in tight blue knee-breeches, frilled white shirt, and an auburn wig. Mrs. Pumper spoke in spite of herself.

"I must have taken your coat instead of Sebastian's, miss. I was told to take it in an inch. And I must have fastened that tab as you asked me on to his coat instead of on to yours. That's what it is. They're exactly alike and I got 'em mixed up. I'm very sorry, but there's no seeing anything up in my room. Both lamps have give out and I asked Mr. Cleebly to see to it and he didn't, and I've had

to buy candles with my own money to get anything done at all."

"You asked Cleeby?"

"Yes, miss, I did! And more than once too!"

"Where's Cleeby?"

"I'm here, miss," said Cleeby, appearing from somewhere.

Aida loomed over the stocky, soiled, creased, bearded figure. Cleeby maintained all his tranquillity. Nobody moved.

"Why didn't you see to the lights in Mrs. Pumper's room?"

"Because yer gave me no chance to, miss. Yer kep' me a-wandering around here till five o'clock this morning, and I want *some* sleep, same as other people. I ain't a mechanical toy as yer wind up."

Aida's volcano erupted suddenly in smoke and flame and covered the stage with a sizzling lava of figurative, metaphorical and symbolical language. Most of it was aimed at Mr. Cleeby, but the entire population of the stage had shares of it. The company and the staff had thought that they knew the full range of Aida's self-expression. But now they admitted themselves to be mistaken. The rich, picturesque, terrible ebullience continued from the splendid mouth which a few moments earlier had been sweet Viola's. At length it ceased. Aida took breath for a further display.

"Listen here, miss," said Mr. Cleeby. "If yer say one word more—one word—I'll wring yer fat neck for ye."

Several people laughed, but Aida Jenkinson was appalled more completely than anybody else had been appalled in Mr. Asprey Chown's theatre that night. It was a knock-out blow. She shrieked, sank down in a heap, and sobbed. Mr. Cleeby lit his pipe.

The heap was a forlorn old woman.

Surreptitious telephones were soon at work. Other theatres had the news. Newspaper offices had the news—but they stuck, following the great British tradition of propriety, to the theory of an illness. Dramatic critics went to bed early, rejoicing in half a night off.

Aida married Mr. Cleeby, the only man who had ever stood up to her. She retired from the stage somewhat poorer in money, but with a master. Mr. Cleeby also retired from the stage, in order to devote all his time to the management of his wife's possessions. She may have had regrets; but generally speaking she was happy enough, Mr. Cleeby being a male of the class, and with the social code and manners, of her father, her brothers, and her first husband.

THE ILLUSTRATED MAN

*Ray Bradbury*

"HEY, the Illustrated Man!"

A calliope screamed, and Mr. William Philippus Phelps stood, arms folded, high on the summer-night platform, a crowd unto himself.

He was an entire civilization. In the Main Country, his chest, the Vasties lived—nipple-eyed dragons swirling over his fleshpot, his almost feminine breasts. His navel was the mouth of a slit-eyed monster—an obscene, in-sucked mouth, toothless as a witch. And there were secret caves where Darklings lurked, his armpits, adrip with slow subterranean liquors, where the Darklings, eyes jealously ablaze, peered out through rank creeper and hanging vine.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps leered down from his freak platform with a thousand peacock eyes. Across the sawdust meadow he saw his wife, Lisabeth, far away, ripping tickets in half, staring at the silver belt buckles of passing men.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps' hands were tattooed roses. At the sight of his wife's interest, the roses shriveled, as with the passing of sunlight.

A year before, when he had led Lisabeth to the marriage bureau to watch her work her name in ink, slowly, on the form, his skin had been pure and white and clean. He glanced down at himself in sudden horror. Now he was like a great painted canvas, shaken in the night wind! How had it happened? Where had it all begun?

It had started with the arguments, and then the flesh, and then the pictures. They had fought deep into the summer nights, she like a brass trumpet forever blaring at him. And he had gone out to eat five thousand steaming hot dogs, ten million hamburgers,

and a forest of green onions, and to drink vast red seas of orange juice. Peppermint candy formed his brontosaur bones, the hamburgers shaped his balloon flesh, and strawberry pop pumped in and out of his heart valves sickeningly, until he weighed three hundred pounds.

"William Philippus Phelps," Lisabeth said to him in the eleventh month of their marriage, "you're dumb and fat."

That was the day the carnival boss handed him the blue envelope. "Sorry, Phelps. You're no good to me with all that gut on you."

"Wasn't I always your best tent man, boss?"

"Once. Not any more. Now you sit, you don't get the work out."

"Let me be your Fat Man."

"I got a Fat Man. Dime a dozen." The boss eyed him up and down. "Tell you what, though. We ain't had a Tattooed Man since Gallery Smith died last year. . . ."

That had been a month ago. Four short weeks. From someone, he had learned of a tattoo artist far out in the rolling Wisconsin country, an old woman, they said, who knew her trade. If he took the dirt road and turned right at the river and then left . . .

He had walked out across a yellow meadow, which was crisp from the sun. Red flowers blew and bent in the wind as he walked, and he came to the old shack, which looked as if it had stood in a million rains.

Inside the door was a silent, bare room, and in the center of the bare room sat an ancient woman.

Her eyes were stitched with red resin-thread. Her nose was sealed with black wax-twine. Her ears were sewn, too, as if a darning-needle dragonfly had stitched all her senses shut. She sat, not moving, in the vacant room. Dust lay in a yellow flour all about, unfootprinted in many weeks; if she had moved it would have shown, but she had not moved. Her hands touched each other like thin, rusted instruments. Her feet were naked and obscene as rain rubbers, and near them sat vials of tattoo milk—red, lightning-blue, brown, cat-yellow. She was a thing sewn tight into whispers and silence.

Only her mouth moved, unsewn: "Come in. Sit down. I'm lonely here."

He did not obey.

"You came for the pictures," she said in a high voice. "I have a picture to show you, first."

She tapped a blind finger to her thrust-out palm. "See!" she cried. It was a tattoo-portrait of William Philipppus Phelps.

"Me!" he said.

Her cry stopped him at the door. "Don't run."

He held to the edges of the door, his back to her. "That's me, that's me on your hand!"

"It's been there fifty years." She stroked it like a cat, over and over.

He turned. "It's an *old* tattoo." He drew slowly nearer. He edged forward and bent to blink at it. He put out a trembling finger to brush the picture. "Old. That's impossible! You don't know me. I don't know you. Your eyes, all sewed shut."

"I've been waiting for you," she said. "And many people." She displayed her arms and legs, like the spindles of an antique chair. "I have pictures on me of people who have already come here to see me. And there are other pictures of other people who are coming to see me in the next one hundred years. And you, you have come."

"How do you know it's me? You can't see!"

"You *feel* like the lions, the elephants, and the tigers, to me. Unbutton your shirt. You need me. Don't be afraid. My needles are as clean as a doctor's fingers. When I'm finished with illustrating you, I'll wait for someone else to walk along out here and find me. And someday, a hundred summers from now, perhaps, I'll just go lie down in the forest under some white mushrooms, and in the spring you won't find anything but a small blue cornflower. . . ."

He began to unbutton his sleeves.

"I know the Deep Past and the Clear Present and the even Deeper Future," she whispered, eyes knotted into blindness, face lifted to this unseen man. "It is on my flesh. I will paint it on yours, too. You will be the only *real* Illustrated Man in the universe. I'll give you special pictures you will never forget. Pictures of the Future on your skin."

She pricked him with a needle.

He ran back to the carnival that night in a drunken terror and elation. Oh, how quickly the old dust-witch had stitched him with color and design. At the end of a long afternoon of being bitten

by a silver snake, his body was alive with portraiture. He looked as if he had dropped and been crushed between the steel rollers of a print press, and come out like an incredible rotogravure. He was clothed in a garment of trolls and scarlet dinosaurs.

"Look!" he cried to Lisabeth. She glanced up from her cosmetic table as he tore his shirt away. He stood in the naked bulb-light of their car-trailer, expanding his impossible chest. Here, the Tremblies, half-maiden, half-goat, leaping when his biceps flexed. Here, the Country of Lost Souls, his chins. In so many accordion pleats of fat, numerous small scorpions, beetles, and mice were crushed, held, hid, darting into view, vanishing, as he raised or lowered his chins.

"My God," said Lisabeth. "My husband's a freak."

She ran from the trailer and he was left alone to pose before the mirror. Why had he done it? To have a job, yes, but, most of all, to cover the fat that had larded itself impossibly over his bones. To hide the fat under a layer of color and fantasy, to hide it from his wife, but most of all from himself.

He thought of the old woman's last words. She had needled him two *special* tattoos, one on his chest, another for his back, which she would not let him see. She covered each with cloth and adhesive.

"You are not to look at these two," she had said.

"Why?"

"Later, you may look. The Future is in these pictures. You can't look now or it may spoil them. They are not quite finished. I put ink on your flesh and the sweat of you forms the rest of the picture, the Future—your sweat and your thought." Her empty mouth grinned. "Next Saturday night, you may advertise! The Big Unveiling! Come see the Illustrated Man unveil his picture! You can make money in that way. You can charge admission to the Unveiling, like to an Art Gallery. Tell them you have a picture that even you never have seen, that *nobody* has seen yet. The most unusual picture ever painted. Almost alive. And it tells the Future. Roll the drums and blow the trumpets. And you can stand there and unveil at the Big Unveiling."

"That's a good idea," he said.

"But only unveil the picture on your chest," she said. "That is first. You must save the picture on your back, under the adhesive, for the following week. Understand?"

"How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," she said. "If you walk with these pictures on you, I will be repaid with my own satisfaction. I will sit here for the next two weeks and think how clever my pictures are, for I make them to fit each man himself and what is inside him. Now, walk out of this house and never come back. Good-by."

"Hey! The Big Unveiling!"

The red signs blew in the night wind: NO ORDINARY TATTOOED MAN! THIS ONE IS "ILLUSTRATED!" GREATER THAN MICHELANGELO! TONIGHT! ADMISSION 10 CENTS!

Now the hour had come. Saturday night, the crowd stirring their animal feet in the hot sawdust.

"In one minute—" the carny boss pointed his cardboard megaphone—"in the tent immediately to my rear, we will unveil the Mysterious Portrait upon the Illustrated Man's chest! Next Saturday night, the same hour, same location, we'll unveil the Picture upon the Illustrated Man's *back*! Bring your friends!"

There was a stuttering roll of drums.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps jumped back and vanished; the crowd poured into the tent, and, once inside, found him re-established upon another platform, the band brassing out a jig-time melody.

He looked for his wife and saw her, lost in the crowd, like a stranger, come to watch a freakish thing, a look of contemptuous curiosity upon her face. For, after all, he was her husband, and this was a thing she didn't know about him herself. It gave him a feeling of great height and warmth and light to find himself the center of the jangling universe, the carnival world, for one night. Even the other freaks—the Skeleton, the Seal Boy, the Yoga, the Magician, and the Balloon—were scattered through the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the great moment!"

A trumpet flourish, a hum of drumsticks on tight cowhide.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps let his cape fall. Dinosaurs, trolls, and half-women-half-snakes writhed on his skin in the stark light.

Ah, murmured the crowd, for surely there had never been a tattooed man like this! The beast eyes seemed to take red fire and blue fire, blinking and twisting. The roses on his fingers seemed to expel a sweet pink bouquet. The tyrannosaurus-rex reared up

along his leg, and the sound of the brass trumpet in the hot tent heavens was a prehistoric cry from the red monster throat. Mr. William Philipppus Phelps was a museum jolted to life. Fish swam in seas of electric-blue ink. Fountains sparkled under yellow suns. Ancient buildings stood in meadows of harvest wheat. Rockets burned across spaces of muscle and flesh. The lightest inhalation of his breath threatened to make chaos of the entire printed universe. He seemed afire, the creatures flinching from the flame, drawing back from the great heat of his pride, as he expanded under the audience's rapt contemplation.

The carny boss laid his fingers to the adhesive. The audience rushed forward silent in the oven vastness of the night tent.

"You ain't seen nothing yet!" cried the carny boss.

The adhesive ripped free.

There was an instant in which nothing happened. An instant in which the Illustrated Man thought that the Unveiling was a terrible and irrevocable failure.

But then the audience gave a low moan.

The carny boss drew back, his eyes fixed.

Far out at the edge of the crowd, a woman, after a moment, began to cry, began to sob, and did not stop.

Slowly, the Illustrated Man looked down at his naked chest and stomach.

The thing that he saw made the roses on his hands discolor and die. All of his creatures seemed to wither, turn inward, shrivel with the arctic coldness that pumped from his heart outward to freeze and destroy them. He stood trembling. His hands floated up to touch that incredible picture, which lived, moved and shivered with life. It was like gazing into a small room, seeing a thing of someone else's life, so intimate, so impossible that one could not believe and one could not long stand to watch without turning away.

It was a picture of his wife, Lisabeth, and himself.

And he was killing her.

Before the eyes of a thousand people in a dark tent in the center of a black-forested Wisconsin land, he was killing his wife.

His great flowered hands were upon her throat, and her face was turning dark and he killed her and he killed her and did not ever in the next minute stop killing her. It was real. While the crowd watched, she died, and he turned very sick. He was about

to fall straight down into the crowd. The tent whirled like a monster bat wing, flapping grotesquely. The last thing he heard was a woman, sobbing, far out on the shore of the silent crowd.

And the crying woman was Lisabeth, his wife.

In the night, his bed was moist with perspiration. The carnival sounds had melted away, and his wife, in her own bed, was quiet now, too. He fumbled with his chest. The adhesive was smooth. They had made him put it back.

He had fainted. When he revived, the carny boss had yelled at him, "Why didn't you say what that picture was like?"

"I didn't know, I didn't," said the Illustrated Man.

"Good God!" said the boss. "Scare hell outa everyone. Scared hell outa Lizzie, scared hell outa me. Christ, where'd you get that damn tattoo?" He shuddered. "Apologize to Lizzie, now."

His wife stood over him.

"I'm sorry, Lisabeth," he said, weakly, his eyes closed. "I didn't know."

"You did it on purpose," she said. "To scare me."

"I'm sorry."

"Either it goes or I go," she said.

"Lisabeth."

"You heard me. That picture comes off or I quit this show."

"Yeah, Phil," said the boss. "That's how it is."

"Did you lose money? Did the crowd demand refunds?"

"It ain't the money, Phil. For that matter, once the word got around, hundreds of people wanted in. But I'm runnin' a clean show. That tattoo comes off! Was this your idea of a practical joke, Phil?"

He turned in the warm bed. No, not a joke. Not a joke at all. He had been as terrified as anyone. Not a joke. That little old dust-witch, what had she done to him and how had she done it? Had she put the picture there? No; she had said that the picture was unfinished, and that he himself, with his thoughts and his perspiration, would finish it. Well, he had done the job all right.

But what, if anything, was the significance? He didn't want to kill anyone. He didn't want to kill Lisabeth. Why should such a silly picture burn here on his flesh in the dark?

He crawled his fingers softly, cautiously down to touch the quivering place where the hidden portrait lay. He pressed tight, and the temperature of that spot was enormous. He could almost

feel that little evil picture killing and killing and killing all through the night.

I don't wish to kill her, he thought, insistently, looking over at her bed. And then, five minutes later, he whispered aloud: "Or do I?"

"What?" she cried, awake.

"Nothing," he said, after a pause. "Go to sleep."

The man bent forward, a buzzing instrument in his hand. "This costs five bucks an inch. Costs more to peel tattoos off than to put 'em on. Okay, jerk the adhesive."

The Illustrated Man obeyed.

The skin man sat back. "Christ! No wonder you want that off! That's ghastly. I don't even want to look at it." He flicked his machine. "Ready? This won't hurt."

The carny boss stood in the tent flap, watching. After five minutes, the skin man changed the instrument head, cursing. Ten minutes later he scraped his chair back and scratched his head. Half an hour passed and he got up, told Mr. William Philippus Phelps to dress, and packed his kit.

"Wait a minute," said the carny boss. "You ain't done the job."

"And I ain't going to," said the skin man.

"I'm paying good money. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, except that damn picture just won't come off. Damn thing must go right down to the bone."

"You're crazy."

"Mister, I'm in business thirty years and never see a tattoo like this. An inch deep, if it's anything."

"But I've got to get it off!" cried the Illustrated Man.

The skin man shook his head. "Only one way to get rid of that."

"How?"

"Take a knife and cut off your chest. You won't live long, but the picture'll be gone."

"Come back here!"

But the skin man walked away.

They could hear the big Sunday-night crowd, waiting.

"That's a big crowd," said the Illustrated Man.

"But they ain't going to see what they came to see," said the carny boss. "You ain't going out there, except with the adhesive."

Hold still now, I'm curious about this *other* picture, on your back. We might be able to give 'em an Unveiling on this one instead."

"She said it wouldn't be ready for a week or so. The old woman said it would take time to set, make a pattern."

There was a soft ripping as the carnny boss pulled aside a flap of white tape on the Illustrated Man's spine.

"What do you see?" gasped Mr. Phelps, bent over.

The carnny boss replaced the tape. "Buster, as a Tattooed Man, you're a washout, ain't you? Why'd you let that old dame fix you up this way?"

"I didn't know who she was."

"She sure cheated you on this one. No design to it. Nothing. No picture at all."

"It'll come clear. You wait and see."

The boss laughed. "Okay. Come on. We'll show the crowd part of you, anyway."

They walked out into an explosion of brassy music.

He stood monstrous in the middle of the night, putting out his hands like a blind man to balance himself in a world now tilted, now rushing, now threatening to spin him over and down into the mirror before which he raised his hands. Upon the flat, dimly lighted table top were peroxides, acids, silver razors, and squares of sandpaper. He took each of them in turn. He soaked the vicious tattoo upon his chest, he scraped at it. He worked steadily for an hour.

He was aware, suddenly, that someone stood in the trailer door behind him. It was three in the morning. There was a faint odor of beer. She had come home from town. He heard her slow breathing. He did not turn. "Lisabeth?" he said.

"You'd better get rid of it," she said, watching his hands move the sandpaper. She stepped into the trailer.

"I didn't want the picture this way," he said.

"You did," she said. "You planned it."

"I didn't."

"I know you," she said. "Oh, I know you hate me. Well, that's nothing. I hate you, I've hated you a long time now. Good God, when you started putting on the fat, you think anyone could love you then? I could teach you some things about hate. Why don't you ask me?"

"Leave me alone," he said.

"In front of that crowd, making a spectacle out of me!"

"I didn't know what was under the tape."

She walked around the table, hands fitted to her hips, talking to the beds, the walls, the table, talking it all out of her. And he thought: *Or did I know? Who made this picture, me or the witch? Who formed it? How? Do I really want her dead? No! And yet.* . . . He watched his wife draw nearer, nearer, he saw the ropy strings of her throat vibrate to her shouting. This and this and *this* was wrong with him! That and that and *that* was unspeakable about him! He was a liar, a schemer, a fat, lazy, ugly man, a child. Did he think he could compete with the carny boss of the ten-peggers? Did he think he was sylphine and graceful, did he think he was a framed El Greco? DaVinci, huh! Michelangelo, my eye! She brayed. She showed her teeth. "Well, you can't scare me into staying with someone I don't want touching me with their slobby paws!" she finished, triumphantly.

"Lisabeth," he said.

"Don't Lisabeth me!" she shrieked. "I know your plan. You had that picture put on to scare me. You thought I wouldn't *dare* leave you. Well!"

"Next Saturday night, the Second Unveiling," he said. "You'll be proud of me."

"Proud! You're silly and pitiful. God, you're like a whale. You ever see a beached whale? I saw one when I was a kid. There it was, and they came and shot it. Some lifeguards shot it. Jesus, a whale!"

"Lisabeth."

"I'm leaving, that's all, and getting a divorce."

"Don't."

"And I'm marrying a man, not a fat woman—that's what you are, so much fat on you there ain't no sex!"

"You can't leave me," he said.

"Just watch!"

"I love you," he said.

"Oh," she said. "Go look at your pictures."

He reached out.

"Keep your hands off," she said.

"Lisabeth."

"Don't come near. You turn my stomach."

"Lisabeth."

All the eyes of his body seemed to fire, all the snakes to move, all the monsters to seethe, all the mouths to widen and rage. He moved toward her—not like a man, but a crowd.

He felt the great blooded reservoir of orangeade pump through him now, the sluice of cola and rich lemon pop pulse in sickening sweet anger through his wrists, his legs, his heart. All of it, the oceans of mustard and relish and all the million drinks he had drowned himself in in the last year were aboil; his face was the color of a steamed beef. And the pink roses of his hands became those hungry, carnivorous flowers kept long years in tepid jungle and now let free to find their way on the night air before him.

He gathered her to him, like a great beast gathering in a struggling animal. It was a frantic gesture of love, quickening and demanding, which, as she struggled, hardened to another thing. She beat and clawed at the picture on his chest.

"You've got to love me, Lisabeth."

"Let go!" she screamed. She beat at the picture that burned under her fists. She slashed at it with her fingernails.

"Oh, Lisabeth," he said, his hands moving up her arms.

"I'll scream," she said, seeing his eyes.

"Lisabeth." The hands moved up to her shoulders, to her neck. "Don't go away."

"Help!" she screamed. The blood ran from the picture on his chest.

He put his fingers about her neck and squeezed.

She was a calliope cut in mid-shriek.

Outside, the grass rustled. There was the sound of running feet.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps opened the trailer door and stepped out.

They were waiting for him. Skeleton, Midget, Balloon, Yoga, Electra, Popeye, Seal Boy. The freaks, waiting in the middle of the night, in the dry grass.

He walked toward them. He moved with a feeling that he must get away; these people would understand nothing, they were not thinking people. And because he did not flee, because he only walked, balanced, stunned, between the tents, slowly, the freaks moved to let him pass. They watched him, because their watching guaranteed that he would not escape. He walked out across the

black meadow, moths fluttering in his face. He walked steadily as long as he was visible, not knowing where he was going. They watched him go, and then they turned and all of them shuffled to the silent car-trailer together and pushed the door slowly wide. . . .

The Illustrated Man walked steadily in the dry meadows beyond the town.

"He went that way!" a faint voice cried. Flashlights bobbed over the hills. There were dim shapes, running.

Mr. William Philipppus Phelps waved to them. He was tired. He wanted only to be found now. He was tired of running away. He waved again.

"There he is!" The flashlights changed direction. "Come on! We'll get the bastard!"

When it was time, the Illustrated Man ran again. He was careful to run slowly. He deliberately fell down twice. Looking back, he saw the tent stakes they held in their hands.

He ran toward a far crossroads lantern, where all the summer night seemed to gather; merry-go-rounds of fireflies whirling, crickets moving their song toward that light, everything rushing, as if by some midnight attraction, toward that one high-hung lantern—the Illustrated Man first, the others close at his heels.

As he reached the light and passed a few yards under and beyond it, he did not need to look back. On the road ahead, in silhouette, he saw the upraised tent stakes sweep violently up, up, and then *down!*

A minute passed.

In the country ravines, the crickets sang. The freaks stood over the sprawled Illustrated Man, holding their tent stakes loosely.

Finally they rolled him over on his stomach. Blood ran from his mouth.

They ripped the adhesive from his back. They stared down for a long moment at the freshly revealed picture. Someone whispered. Someone else swore, softly. The Thin Man pushed back and walked away and was sick. Another and another of the freaks stared, their mouths trembling, and moved away, leaving the Illustrated Man on the deserted road, the blood running from his mouth.

In the dim light, the unveiled Illustration was easily seen.

It showed a crowd of freaks bending over a dying fat man on a dark and lonely road, looking at a tattoo on his back which illustrated a crowd of freaks bending over a dying fat man on a . . .

GOOD TIME BESSIE



Louis Bromfield

ONCE long ago he was a matinee idol, of the good old-fashioned kind. Everyone knew him when he walked through Peacock Alley at the old Waldorf, and palpitating young women used to stand outside the stage door waiting to see him come out and climb into a hansom and drive off without ever looking to right or left. He must have been a dapper fellow because even as an old man with very little money, living in one room of a dusty old-fashioned hotel on the upper West Side, he managed somehow to give the appearance of a rather sporting old gentleman who had an excellent valet. He wasn't one to give in to circumstances, and he loved life. The terrible changes he had seen in the theater and in the world and in his own circumstances never succeeded in discouraging him or breaking his spirit.

I knew him through his daughter, and I used to go sometimes with her to call on him. He was inclined to live in the past and tell stories of what to him was the Golden Age of New York. Whenever he talked of it, it certainly sounded so, and so it may have been. He loved the island of Manhattan with a profound passion and had no desire to leave it, even in summer. In the Golden Age, he said, there wasn't any "season" in the theater. It went on the whole year round, winter and summer, and so he never got into the habit of leaving town save occasionally on an outing to Staten Island or Jersey City or when his company made a tour; and then he was miserable. He used to tell some tall stories, and he told me this one. I am leaving it in his words because he

told it so much better than I could possibly do it. I retire to the role of commentator and give place to him.

His room was not very large and it had a tiny narrow view of the North River, framed on both sides by apartment houses. It was a neat room, a room as dapper as the old gentleman himself. There was a bed in one corner, a table, an easy chair and two straight chairs, a small library made up almost entirely of collections of plays, and myriads of photographs, most of them rather yellow and spotted—of Ada Rehan and Rose Coghlan, the Drews, Lester Wallack and dozens of others. He had lived through three generations of the theater and known in two of them, at least, everybody of the least importance.

But this is the story the old gentleman told me, while he rocked and smoked a big cigar out of the box I brought him. I lay on the bed listening and upsetting him a little, I think, because I disturbed the neatness of his room. But the stiff chairs were impossible for any length of time.

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"Bessie," he said, "was a big woman made on the scale they no longer make 'em . . . the kind of woman who warmed a man's heart and made a light come into his eyes. I used to see it happen again and again. I remember her as she looked when she used to come into Jack's early in the morning after the night spots like Rector's and Churchill's had begun to turn out their lights. The door would open and in would come Bessie with two or three men—sometimes there were a half-dozen—and when she came into the room something came into it with her which was not there before. Everyone looked up and at first sight of her there was always a little hush and then two or three people—hicks or people who didn't know Broadway—would say, 'That must be Bessie Devine.' They knew her from her picture in the papers or from the little cards you got with cigarettes . . . pictures sometimes in tights and sometimes in a short spangled skirt. Her corsets must have been reinforced with steel because God never meant her to have a wasp waist. I ought to know if anyone did. She was built like Juno rather than Venus with big breasts and hips that were on the same scale as her vitality and her big warm nature. . . . She had honey-colored hair and blue eyes and the complexion of

a peach. Her voice was loud and deep and when she laughed you could hear her all over the restaurant. Whenever she had had a little too much Irish whisky—she hated champagne and called it a 'sissy drink'—it would turn warm and a little husky.

"Nothing ever seemed to dim that vitality and health of hers. She could drink and do without sleep and raise hell for days at a time and still look as blooming and fresh as a strawberry, fresh-picked with the dew still on it. She was too big to be a good dancer, and she never took the trouble to learn how to sing properly. Part of her charm for audiences lay in her amateurish quality; she never quite learned how to wait for a laugh or to put over her points. She always just missed them with a lazy indifference which in itself made you laugh. I think toward the end, it grew into a kind of technique or method which was all her own. If she hadn't broken her neck, she might have lived to be a fine performer, but she didn't live long enough to take any of it seriously. There were too many things in life that were more fun than worrying about being professional—things like eating and drinking and loving and giving people a good time. I think she liked the stage simply because it was fun. She liked cracking jokes with the stage hands and the girls in the chorus. What always got across the footlights was her colossal vitality. The tired people in the audience fed off it. When she came on, a kind of wave of pleasure and fun went right through the whole house.

"Probably you wouldn't know what the theater was like at the time she flourished but it wasn't anything like it is today. It was fun then . . . I'm talking about the end of the nineties when you were nothing but a kid. And everybody came to see it and people liked the theater because it was the theater. It hadn't been corrupted by a lot of art ideas, and critics didn't come to a new play just to find out whether it fitted into their own ideas of art or the ideas they were trying to work out in plays they were writing themselves. If a play was good entertainment they liked it. And in those days actors were actors, boy! They didn't try to make an impression by doing nothing at all, or by going through a bag of tricks that they'd been told was art. They each had their own way and everything was free and easy and every actor gave everything he had to give, and that was what the public wanted. They liked an actor to tear up the carpet and break things.

"No, something is wrong with Americans nowadays. They've all

got kind of pallid and anemic, and the theater along with them. But back in the nineties the theater was the theater—the way it was in the time of Molière and Shakespeare. People didn't go to it just to say, 'Oh, isn't she real,' and 'Isn't that set wonderful!' Stage designers were just scene painters and the play was all the better for it. There weren't a lot of interior decorators cluttering up the stage with a lot of stuff that would get them a big hand on the opening night and then ruin a play by cluttering it all up with antique furniture and plush drapes. And actors were content to be actors. They didn't try to mix with society people any more than society people tried to mix with them. *They* knew where the fun was. It was in the theater and Rector's and Delmonico's and not in a Fifth Avenue drawing room. I guess the movies have spoiled things too by taking away from the theater its best audience. I mean all those people who used to sit in the balconies and nigger heaven. They didn't want any grim realism. They wanted illusion and grandeur and splendor and real comedy like the nasty kind that Molière gave 'em.

"Well, anyway, there's no use going on about all that. I only bring it up to give you some idea of the kind of background Bessie had and the kind of person she was. There aren't any like her any more. As I said, she couldn't act, not according to our standards, but she was a hell of a lot better actress than most of these mincing respectable school marms that pass as actresses nowadays. No, men were men, and women were women in those days, and love affairs were love affairs.

"The first time I ever saw Bessie she was playing in *The Minx*, a kind of second role . . . you know, the friend of the heroine . . . and she was a great foil for little Herminie Ross who played the title role. Herminie was small with a little face like a Persian pussycat and a great little comedienne, and Bessie was big and blond with a big voice and a hearty laugh, and together they made the show, which wasn't so much of a show at that. And the moment I laid eyes on Bessie I took a quick look at the program to find out what her name was and said to myself, 'That's the girl for me!'

"Let me see, that's about thirty-five or forty years ago. That would make me about thirty-two at the time . . . just the right age, not too young to be a sap and not too old so that I couldn't take it, right all the way to the limit. Boy! I used to stay up all

night and then go home and make love till three in the afternoon and be at the theater fresh as a daisy at a quarter to eight. I was in the company at Wallack's that season, but just then I was playing only three nights a week so the rest of the time I had off except for rehearsals.

"Well, by the time the curtain came down on the last act of *The Minx* I was worked into a lather about this Bessie Devine. About the middle of the second act I forgot all about the play and all about the part Bessie was supposed to be portraying. She was just a woman to me—a woman called Bessie Devine I'd never seen before, who was my kind of woman. So when the curtain calls were over I went around backstage to call on Herminie Ross. She wasn't my type at all, with her little pussycat ways, and she knew it too, so there wasn't any trouble. We were good friends the way a man and a woman can be when they know they like each other and don't want anything from each other. I found her in her dressing room, sort of smothered in flowers with a lot of Johnnies waiting around. That was more her school . . . Johnnies with topcoats and mustaches and hansom cabs at the door. I told her she was great in that part, which she was, and after a minute she got the dressy boys out of her dressing room and when they were gone, she looked at me and said, 'I know what you're after. It's not me. It's Bessie you want to meet.' You see she knew my type.

"I said, yes, it was, and she said, 'I knew if you saw her, you'd fall. She's not very ladylike but then you don't like 'em that way.'

"She put on some sort of a flossy wrap and said to her maid, 'Look after those diamonds, Cleora, till I come back,' and we went out the door through all the Johnnies and across to the other side of the stage. They gave me dirty looks. They always hated good-looking actors, I guess because they knew that the actors got for nothing what cost them diamonds and flowers and hansom cabs.

"Herminie didn't knock on the door; she just pushed it open. There was a squeal and I saw Bessie snatch up a dressing gown and hold it before her. No costume could have become her more. She clutched it all in a lump so that beneath the edge of it I caught sight of her big fine legs and above it a glimpse of her big breasts. Her long blond hair was undone and fell over her white shoulders.

"I expected a scene to follow the squeal. I'd been through the same sort of surprise often enough before and usually there were screams of indignation and bad language, even from ladies who had no temerity whatever at showing themselves under almost any

other circumstances. But Bessie seemed to take it all naturally as a joke.

"She laughed and said, 'You almost caught me. Better luck next time.'

"Herminie started to introduce me but Bessie said, 'Oh, you don't need to go into that. I've seen him plenty of times over at Wallack's.' Still clutching the dressing gown to her with one hand she held out the other. 'Sure, I know Mr. Davenport. I go over to Wallack's every time I have a moment off to learn how to act.'

"And then I caught sight of an odd little woman sitting in the background. She was small and rather withered in appearance and dressed in clothes which gave the impression of being too big for her. They weren't actually, but everything she wore seemed to be oversized as if she had withered away since she got them. She wore an enormous fur around her neck and an enormous hat with plumes which seemed to extinguish her like a candle snuffer. The hat and furs must have cost a lot once but they were shabby now. The plumes drooped wearily and the furs had a plucked look.

"Graciously, as if she were fully dressed and wearing a tiara instead of being stark naked save for a dressing gown stained with make-up pressed against her stomach, she turned and said, 'Meet my sister, Mrs. Rafferty.'

"Mrs. Rafferty gave me a faded smile and Bessie said, 'Don't go away, Mr. Davenport. Just give me a minute to slip something on and you can come in.'

"'Sure,' I said. 'I'll wait. Get dressed and we'll get something to eat.'

"'Fine,' said Bessie and closed the door.

"Outside I thanked Herminie and asked, 'Who's Mrs. Rafferty? Ought I to ask her too?'

"'No,' said Herminie. 'That's only her sister. She's got six children and her husband drinks. Bessie has to look after 'em all. Whenever Mrs. Rafferty appears it means there's been trouble at home. Probably Rafferty is in jail.'

"And with that Herminie crossed the stage and went back to her pussycat nest with the flowers and the diamonds guarded by Cleora and the Johnnies waiting outside. It struck me as funny that there weren't any flowers in Bessie's dressing room, and certainly there wasn't a single diamond. It was just a bare ugly dressing room, empty save for her own clothes.

"And then out of the darkness in the wings came the figure of

'Bink' Mallory, not dressed up the way he always was in the evening but still in a checked suit with a topcoat and a brown derby. His big red face looked depressed and when he grinned it was a melancholy grin which didn't do justice to all the gold teeth he had.

"He said, 'Hello,' and I said, 'Hello. What's the matter? Why aren't you dressed up?'"

"I just got in from Long Branch. They gave me a spring cleaning down at the track today and I need considerable cheerin' up. So I came along to see Bessie and get a laugh. I ain't in the way, am I?"

"No," I said. "Not in *my* way. Not exactly. I just met her for the first time. I asked her out for supper. I'm not in your way, am I?"

"No, I just want some fun and a couple of good laughs. We can all go out together. I'll clear out early. I ain't had any sleep for two nights."

"And just then we were joined by somebody else coming out of the shadows and it was Harry Peel, who'd just finished his act at the Victoria Roof. He must have been awful funny that night at Hammerstein's because there wasn't any comedy left in him. He had a face a mile long.

"Hello, boys," he said, "waiting for Bessie? Hope I'm not in the way?"

"No. Come along and eat."

"I've just had a row with the management," he said, "and walked out, and I needed that dough. God knows when I'll get another good booking. I want to go and get drunk."

"So the three of us waited there till Bessie got her clothes on, exchanging stories and talking Broadway gossip. It struck me as funny that there weren't any Johnnies outside the door waiting for Bessie . . . but only an actor, a race-track man and a comic juggler. And then Bessie came out, looking big and beautiful and healthy, dressed all in black with a black feather boa which trailed on the floor and a big black hat covered with ostrich plumes. Something came out the door with her . . . health and vigor and good nature and love, I think. Love for everybody and everything. She wanted everybody to have a good time.

"So the four of us went to Rector's for a time and then to Jack's and there Harry Peel left us. He was drunk and happy again. Bessie had done that to him with her stories. She had a way of seeing funny things that happened during the day on the street, in res-

taurants, among the stage hands, and afterward she would recount them, not always in the most delicate language but in an irresistibly funny fashion. In spite of being no actress at all she was a good mimic. She could re-create for you any character which had caught her attention during the day. Harry Peel had forgotten about his quarrel and his lost job. Tomorrow he'd get up with fresh spirits and a new point of view, ready to begin all over again.

"About five o'clock 'Bink' Mallory with his checked suit and brown derby bade us good night and I was left to see Bessie home. That was what I was waiting for all the time but now when the time came, I didn't know exactly how to cope with Bessie. Maybe I should say I didn't exactly know how to approach what was on my mind. You'd have said that it was the easiest thing in the world to say to a woman like Bessie, 'I'm crazy about you. Take me home with you,' but it wasn't. God knows I wasn't any novice at such things and I knew at least twenty ways of leading up to the subject, but none of them seemed to fit Bessie. Suddenly, left alone with her, all my slick Casanova tricks just curled up and died.

"I've had about forty years to think it over and I've come to the conclusion that Bessie had a peculiar quality which most girls I knew never had. She was on the level, more on the level than any woman I ever knew, and somehow when you'd tried to pull a fast one with Bessie you were ashamed of yourself because you knew she wouldn't do that kind of thing to you. Nobody ever pretended that Bessie was pure as the driven snow, but whenever she was generous with her favors there was a reason for it and the reason wasn't money.

"Anyway, we got into a hansom. I drove her home just at dawn to the old Hoffman House where she was living then, and all the way there I never made a pass at her or even a suggestive remark. We just talked like any two nice people that like each other—about the milk wagons, and the show and about acting. And when we left each other I asked if I could see her again soon and she said, 'Sure, come on around any night.' "

3

"When I came home that night, Lester heard me open the door and got up as usual to make me a cup of tea. Lester was my valet. He was a little Cockney I found in London when I was over there with Ada Rehan. He wanted to come to the States so I brought

him home with me. We were both kids then. I must have been about twenty-four or five and Lester was about twenty-one. He'd been with me for eight years when I first met Bessie and he had a kind of worship for me, like a faithful dog. He hadn't any life of his own. He was small and ugly and he didn't seem to know anyone or how to make any friends. He just kept to my flat, and the only fun he had was when people came in and we had a party and he could wait on them and look at the beautiful women and the sporting men. He'd trained himself to wake the moment he heard my key turn in the lock and then he'd get up and make me tea and see that I got safely to bed.

"I was never able to discover what went on inside his head. Sometimes I used to think nothing went on in there, but I guess there must have been something because there never was a better servant. I used to tell him a good many things . . . the kind of things I didn't tell to anyone else, just for the pleasure it gave me to see his eyes light up and a funny grin that would curl up one side of his ugly little face. And that way he had a kind of life of his own, which wasn't real, of course, but came to him through me. Years afterward I found out that I was pretty close to being right about it. In some funny way he got to imagining that he was *me*, and that all the escapades I went through were really happening to him too. He'd spent a good part of his life being hungry and beaten and he knew he was little and ugly and so he was afraid of ever trying anything on his own. He worked it all out somehow. I suppose when I was out all night he was with me in a funny way, seeing all the rowdy men and the beautiful women I saw. Of course he never did go out and he never did go with me. He managed it in a kind of dream life. It was just the same whether he was awake or asleep.

"Anyway, there he was when I came home and he said, as he poured my tea, 'Miss Ransom came in tonight, sir.' She was a girl from the Casino chorus that I'd been carrying on with for some time.

" 'Did she wait?' I asked him.

" 'No, she didn't,' he said. 'I didn't let her in.'

" 'Why?' I asked him.

" 'Because I found her picture torn up in your wastepaper basket, sir. I was afraid she might come in and break things up.'

" 'That's right, Lester,' I said. 'That's just what she would have

done. If she comes back again always keep the door on the chain. She's the kind that gets cold mad and smashes things up. It's all over with Miss Ransom, Lester.'

" 'I'm glad of that, sir.'

" 'Why, Lester?' I asked him.

" 'If you'll excuse me, sir, I always thought you couldn't count on her.'

"That was exactly it. She was a nice girl but you couldn't count on her and she had tantrums; sometimes right in a restaurant she'd throw all the dishes on the floor and begin to scream. I didn't care much for that. I didn't mind breaking it off. The funny thing was that Lester knew all about it. He'd sort of been going through the affair with me. He'd had a half-dozen pictures of Polly Ransom, which he'd cut out of newspapers and theatrical magazines, pinned to the wall of his room for months, just as if he was the one who was carrying on with her. When I looked into his room the next day they were all gone.

"The next night I went to *The Minx* again, only instead of going out front I came behind stage and spent my time between Herminie's dressing room and Bessie's. When one was on the stage I went to sit in the dressing room of the other, and so I came to learn a lot about Bessie while she was before the footlights and Herminie was waiting to go on. Usually Herminie couldn't bear any other pretty woman who happened to be in the same company with her, but Bessie she didn't seem to mind. She even liked her, and while I sat talking with her I began to understand why. Bessie wasn't in any sense a rival. On the stage she served as a foil to Herminie and made Herminie seem even more *petite*, and certainly more young than she really was, and off the stage she didn't offer any competition, at least any competition that Herminie need worry about. I began to learn why there weren't any Johnnies waiting for Bessie and why there weren't flowers and diamonds in her dressing room.

"It seemed that she couldn't stomach Johnnies. She was born on Ninth Avenue and she didn't like flossy manners and what she called 'clubmen.' In the first place their dandified manners made her nervous and in the second place they bored her. And gentlemen, she said, were 'dirty' when they made love. Afterward when we were living together she explained what it was she meant. It took her a long time because she wasn't very good at words, but I finally

discovered that what she objected to was their condescension. Most of them felt, she said, that they were so damned superior to you that they were doing you a favor and soiling themselves in the process. And she wouldn't have any of that. So whenever some Johnny turned up, she told him right out that it wasn't any use trying to hang around because she never went out with clubmen. What she liked, Herminie said, was fellow actors and sports and often enough chaps who were down on their luck.

"She just goes around looking for fellows who are broke. She can spot 'em a mile off,' Herminie used to say. 'So she doesn't come out very well where diamonds and flowers are concerned. God knows she could use a few jewels and a little cash now and then. She never has any. She's always giving it away. That girl just hasn't got any sense about money. She ought to cut loose from that family of hers . . . the Raffertys and all her brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts and God knows what. As if they weren't enough she's always paying the rent for chorus girls and doctors' bills for stage hands. What's going to become of her? A girl has to look out for herself in this business. If Bessie had any sense she could have a cold hundred thousand laid away right now. And she hasn't got a dime.'

"Well, all that didn't exactly put me off Bessie. Anyway, you knew that if she liked you, she *liked* you. She wasn't just pretending to get out of you what she could. What Herminie said explained a lot of other things about Bessie . . . why it was so hard to get down to brass tacks on that first evening and why every now and then, right in the midst of all her laughing and good nature, her face would suddenly grow sad when she thought nobody was watching her, and sometimes you'd hear her sigh, very quietly, as if she didn't want anybody to hear her. You see, all the time, down underneath all that good-time manner, she knew what it was all about. She knew the human race was pretty sad and tragic, only she refused to admit it and she wasn't going to let anybody else suspect what she knew. She was just born that way . . . *knowing*, and I always had a feeling that she took the responsibility for the whole mess on her own big handsome shoulders and did her best to straighten it out. She was always taking over the troubles of other people, and didn't want you to know about it. It would have made her feel sort of ashamed.

"Well, to make a long story short, Bessie and I took up together.

It must have been love because God knows on her side she couldn't have expected anything else from an actor making a couple of hundred dollars a week. We had a little flat of two rooms where we used to meet. Lester stayed on in the other flat to take care of it and I didn't see so much of him. Sometimes I wouldn't come home for two or three days, and that upset him terribly. He worried over not being able to get up in the morning when I came in to make my tea, and he fussed because he couldn't look me over from head to foot every time I went out to see that I was turned out the way a gentleman should be. And his own dreary little life got drearier and drearier because after Bessie became my sweetheart, I didn't have any more of those parties he used to like so much, when he could pour drinks and listen to the talk of all the sports and the beautiful women.

"Once or twice he said to me, very respectfully, 'Sir, you ought to bring Miss Devine around here some time to show her what a nice flat you have and how well it's kept.' There was a little reproach in his voice as if I'd insulted him somehow by not bringing her to see what a good, devoted servant he was. I kept promising to bring her around and have a party for her but I kept putting it off and then it was too late and Bessie was where she couldn't ever go to parties again.

"It was the happiest time in my life. God knows I've known plenty of women but never one that could touch Bessie. Life was full of excitement and fun twenty-four hours of the day. We were together for about six months and then my father died out in Kansas City and I had to go out there to my mother. It was in August, I remember, and hotter than Hades. I left Lester in the flat and said good-by to Bessie, telling her I'd be back in ten days or so. Well, there was trouble about the will and my mother was sick and all broken up and I couldn't leave her, and so ten days got to be two weeks and then three and then four. Bessie wasn't much at writing letters but I used to hear from her about once a week, little short letters full of bad spelling with news of New York and a lot of stories and jokes she'd picked up during the week. They always made me laugh and feel better. I couldn't read all of them to my mother because some of the stories weren't exactly the kind you could tell to nice old ladies, but I used to read her parts of them and they'd make her laugh and feel much better. It was as if Bessie had the power of putting some of her big hearty self into an

envelope to send out to me in Kansas City. I've always thought it was as much Bessie's letters as the doctors themselves that helped my mother to get well that time.

"Anyway, she began to get strong again and I bought my ticket for a Friday to go back to Bessie and work and then on a Wednesday I got a telegram from Herminie Ross. I'll never forget that telegram. For me it was just as if the world had suddenly come to an end. It was like getting up one morning to find that the whole universe had gone cockeyed and the sun had failed to come up. Bessie was dead. She'd been killed in an accident during a political outing in Hoboken.

"I took the next train back and when I got to my flat Lester wasn't there. It was the first time in all our life together he hadn't come to the door when I rang the bell. I went to the janitor and he gave me a note. He said it was from Lester and that he had written it himself for Lester because Lester couldn't read or write. When I opened it I discovered the second blow at the foundations of my life. Lester was gone.

"The janitor had written for him something like this:

Dear sir;

I regret to say that I have had to leave. I cannot tell you the reason. I was very satisfied with the place and you have always been more than kind to me, but I have to go. Something has happened. I could not face you again on account of shame. Forgive me, sir, if I ask God to bless and keep you.

Your devoted servant,

Lester Bitts.

"Then for a day or two I forgot all about Lester. Bessie was the only one I could think of . . . Bessie whom I would never see again.

"Herminie told me the story. It seemed that Bessie had been asked to be the guest of honor at a Democratic political picnic and rally over in Hoboken and as she always said yes, she accepted, and was crowned Queen of the Rally on a throne. She must have looked wonderful because that was just the sort of big human background in which she belonged. You could just see her there in the midst of all those families drinking beer and enjoying themselves . . . Bessie seated on a throne with a crown on her head and a

stein of beer in one hand . . . big and handsome and good-natured.

"The accident happened late in the afternoon. It seemed that three breweries had sent beer trucks with their finest big horses drawing them . . . six big Percherons on each truck. They took part in a kind of pageant. It was good advertisement too for the breweries. About five o'clock Bessie got the notion that as Queen of the occasion she wanted to drive one of the trucks, and as everybody was feeling gay, they let her do it. Still wearing her crown, she climbed up to the seat and took the reins. There was a driver beside her to show her how to drive six big brewery horses at once, but he'd had a little too much beer and he and Bessie began to laugh and the horses got out of hand and started to gallop. When the driver snatched the reins from her and tried to straighten them out, they got tangled. The horses went faster and faster with Bessie and the driver laughing and clinging to the high seat, until they crashed into a corner of the grandstand and the whole truck went over with Bessie and the driver underneath. When they finally righted the truck and pulled her out, she was dead.

"We gave her a wonderful funeral. Everybody on Broadway came and hordes of people, mostly shabby men and women down on their luck whom nobody had ever seen. They were, I guess, all people whom Bessie had helped. And all the Rafferty family were there and the uncles and aunts and cousins from Ninth Avenue. There were masses and masses of flowers from blankets of roses down to scrubby little bunches of nasturtiums. I hope there's an afterlife and that Bessie was able to see what was going on. She would have loved her own funeral."

4

"I wasn't the only one who missed her. There were all those down and outers who came to the funeral, and people in places like Rector's and Jack's would suddenly miss something, not quite knowing what it was, and then as the evening wore on they would discover that what they missed was Bessie. They didn't see her sweep in with her plumes and feather boa and they didn't hear her loud laugh. The table in Jack's and at Rector's where actors and sporting men once gathered like flies on honey, was empty now. Something was gone.

"As for Lester I thought that some day he'd just walk in the door

and go about his work again without saying anything. A week passed and then another and then another and finally I got in a little Filipino to take his place, planning to fire him when Lester returned; but Lester never came back. I got the police to looking for him—Mike Regan at the Forty-sixth Street station was a friend of mine and he saw that they searched thoroughly—but they never found hide nor hair of him. It was easy enough for him to disappear because he hadn't any friends or connections except me and so there wasn't anybody you could question about him. When I showed his note to the police they said, 'What was he ashamed of? What'd he steal? Didn't you miss nothing?' And I said, 'No, I didn't miss anything.' All my diamond studs and my two fancy watches—everything of any value I found locked in my strongbox just the way they always were. Lester had left the key with the janitor. As a matter of fact, there was one thing missing but I never spoke of it to the police, partly because it seemed so unimportant and partly because I had a feeling—you know, one of those feelings you can't account for which are always right—that I'd better leave the whole thing lie. The only thing missing was a picture of Bessie, cabinet size, in an evening dress with hat, plumes and boa.

"The police gave up the problem of Lester and I began to settle down. I wasn't very old—only in my middle thirties—but somehow after Bessie, I never had any more fun larruping around. Right in the middle of a love affair I'd begin to be bored and start comparing the woman to Bessie and then that would be the end of it. So one day I married Minnie Sands. She was just a kid then, playing ingenues in our company. I never regretted it. It was one of those good old-fashioned stage marriages that don't happen any more, with kids born in dressing rooms and carried along on tour to sleep in trunk lids and bureau drawers. I've been lucky all my life. Bessie was one kind of luck and Minnie another and both of 'em were okay.

"And in the meanwhile Herminie Ross married one of her Johnnies. She's still alive and you read about her now and then in the society columns, a respected and fashionable old lady. She gives a lot of her money to charity and works on Actors' Relief Boards. After Bessie died and Herminie got married I didn't see much of her until one day about ten years ago I was asked to speak at one of those high-brow drama meetings, and there sitting next to me at the speakers' table was Herminie. She hadn't changed very much

and gradually we got to talking about the old days, and when lunch was over, she said to me, 'Why don't you come home with me for a cup of tea? We can talk there without having everybody listen in on us.' I knew she was dying to let down her hair and talk, but she didn't want to in front of all the other society women at the lunch. And that was just what she did. She had done well for herself, as well as poor Bessie had done poorly, but in her heart Herminie was still a trouser and sometimes, she said, she nearly died for wanting to talk about the old days.

"I stayed until eight o'clock and then it was she told me why Lester had disappeared. All the time she and Bessie were playing in *The Minx* they used to tell each other all their adventures, usually before the show, because afterward there never was any time, what with all Herminie's admirers tramping in and out. Bessie used to tell her everything and one night Bessie came in and said to her, 'Herminie, every night I come in now for a week or more there's been a little man standing under the street lamp outside the stage door. I think he wants to speak to me from the way he looks at me. I don't know what he wants but I guess if it was a touch he'd have spoken of it before now. I feel kind of sorry for him, hanging around like that. He looks so scared and unhappy.'

"So Herminie said, 'Why don't you speak to him?' and Bessie said, 'All right, I will.'

"Well, Herminie didn't hear any more about it for about a week and then one night Bessie came in early to the theater and came straight to Herminie's dressing room and said she had a funny story to tell her.

"She said, 'I did speak to the little man and I took him home with me.' And Herminie said, 'What do you mean took him home with you?'

" 'Just that,' said Bessie. 'I took him home with me. He's been with me for a week, day and night.'

" 'What about Jack?' asked Herminie, meaning me, and Bessie said, 'It's all right. What he don't know won't hurt him, and anyway some day he'll understand. Wait until you hear the story.'

"It seemed that when she did speak to the little man, he was so frightened he couldn't answer her at first and then slowly she got out of him that it *was* her he'd been waiting to see night after night under the lamppost. He was afraid he'd annoyed her and he said that all he ever asked was just the chance to look at her as she

came in and out of the theater, if it didn't upset her. He said she didn't need to bother with a poor little thing like him with so many other men wanting to make love to her and marry her. He didn't know it, of course, but he'd said just the right thing, about the only thing he could have said to make Bessie notice him, only I guess he was so scared at the moment that he didn't even want to say the right thing. Anyway, he was just Bessie's dish—somebody scared and abused and humble. So she said, 'Come along and have a bite to eat.' But he thanked her and said he couldn't go to any restaurant. 'It's all right,' he said, 'if you'll just let me look at you every night and say good evening sometimes.' He kept addressing her very respectfully as 'Madam' which made Bessie laugh. So she said, 'All right. You're coming home with me and I'll cook you up something. You look as if you hadn't had a square meal for months.'

"When they got home Bessie made it into a real party. She opened champagne for him and Irish whisky for herself and they sat down to have a big time. All the time the little man was scared to death and tongue-tied. She couldn't get anything out of him for a long time but 'yes' and 'no' until presently the champagne began to work and then he talked about himself, and Bessie drew him out.

"She found out that he'd been an orphan since he was three years old and that he'd worked hard ever since he was a kid and nobody had ever loved him. 'I guess I was too ugly,' he said, 'and too measly for any woman ever to look at me.' Anyway, no woman ever did from the time he was a kid. 'But inside,' he said, 'I'm just like any other man. I fall in love but nothing ever comes of it. I wouldn't dare ask any woman to speak to me.' And then Bessie got out of him that he'd been beaten and kicked and abused so much as a child that all he ever wanted to do was shrink away from people and hide, for fear of a blow or a nasty crack. So he didn't know anybody at all.

"Well, by this time the whisky Bessie was drinking had begun to work on her too and she began to cry over his story and said, 'I'll tell you what you're going to do. You're going to stay here with me. I'll fix things up for you.'

"And so, still trembling and frightened, the little man stayed on. For more than a week except when she was at the theater, Bessie cosseted and cared for him . . . this poor little man who had never been loved by any creature and had never been a woman's lover or known what love was. And Bessie confided in Herminie her belief

that when she had finished with him he'd be a different man. He wouldn't be scared or timid ever again and anyway he wouldn't die without ever having known the love of a woman. And what a woman! One who couldn't be bought for any amount of money or diamonds.

"Herminie said that he came with Bessie to the theater every night and was there waiting when the curtain went down, but he never came inside. He waited for her under the lamppost at the end of the stage door alley. He'd stay there from a quarter to eight when he left Bessie until midnight when she came out again. He hadn't anything else to do. And sometimes he'd see Herminie coming out with three or four admirers, wearing all her orchids and diamonds. And then Bessie would come out alone and take him home with her.

"It was Herminie who discovered who he was. One night Bessie's sister Mrs. Rafferty came into her dressing room with an extra load of troubles and so Bessie was late, and when Herminie came out the little man was standing by the lamppost. At sight of her he turned away quickly into the shadows but this time he didn't turn quickly enough. She saw that it was Lester.

"But Bessie never found out because she never again came into Herminie's dressing room for a gossip. The next day she went to Hoboken to be Queen of the Rally and Herminie never saw her again alive."

5

"When I left Herminie's swell house on Fifth Avenue that night, I didn't go home but went straight to Jack's and had dinner in a corner, all alone. Somehow or other the occasion demanded it. There didn't seem to be any other place in New York that was fitting and proper and in a way the melancholy state of that grand old restaurant was right too. Prohibition had come in and Jack's was on its last legs. There weren't any actors or sporting men. There wasn't anyone there save a few dreary people eating here and there alone or in twos and threes; but there were the ghosts of Diamond Jim Brady and Herminie Ross and Edna MacCauley and Good Time Bessie. There was, I think, even the ghost of myself.

"I ate alone, served by a tired, somewhat untidy waiter, who moved about as if he were serving ghosts. And I thought about what Herminie, sitting in her expensive, decorated drawing room had

told me. Bessie, long ago, had been right when she said, 'Some day he'll understand.' I did understand. If I had discovered about Lester twenty-five years before, I would have been crazy with anger and jealousy at both of them, never seeing that what Bessie had done was perhaps the kindest thing she had ever done in a life that was given over to doing kind things for other people. There was in the story something so fantastically grand and human, that what I cared and thought was of no importance. Like in the old story of the Juggler of Notre Dame, I think God understood. Bessie gave the only thing she had to give, and believe me it was no small gift. Sitting there over my oysters I was sure now that Lester had been there at the funeral, lost somewhere in the great crowd, hiding from me . . . the only other person besides Bessie that he had loved.

"Only one thing tormented me and that was a terrible curiosity to know what had become of Lester in the twenty-five years since he left the note written for him by the janitor. Perhaps, I thought, it changed his whole life. Perhaps he's married now with children and grandchildren, maybe living right here in New York somewhere near me. Or maybe he forgot his fear of women and became a lady killer. Or maybe . . . but everything I tried to figure out about him was wrong, I found out in the end.

"My wife died and my children got married and I wasn't any longer a leading man but a character actor and jobs got scarcer and scarcer. The pictures never seemed to have any use for me and the new people who came to Broadway didn't remember me even if they'd ever heard of me. And so to make ends meet, I gave up my flat and came up here to live. It isn't a very good hotel but it's clean and neat and the rooms are big with high ceilings, and I can't complain about life. I've had a lot of fun and that's the thing that's important. I can sit here and look at the river and have a lot of fun just thinking about it all.

"Anyway, I'd been here only a day or two when I heard a quarrel going on downstairs in the lobby back of the screen that hides the entrance to the service elevator and I heard somebody speak Bessie Devine's name, which I hadn't heard for years, and then somebody, somebody young, said, 'Bessie Devine, my eye! There wasn't any such person!' and the young voice laughed and the old voice said, 'You don't know what you're talking about . . . you and your silly moving picture magazines.'

"Waiting for the elevator, I managed to peek through a crack in the screen and there standing with two or three suits, freshly pressed and on hangers, was Lester. There couldn't be any mistake. Nobody ever had such an ugly face as Lester's. It was so ugly that age made little difference to it. And he had the poorest little rickety body in the world, because as a child he'd never had enough to eat.

"I didn't speak to him then but I sent for Jimmy, the bellboy he'd been quarreling with. Jimmy is a nice kid who grew up to be the porter. And I asked him about Lester, because it *was* Lester all right. There wasn't any mistake. And Jimmy said, 'Oh, he's nuts! He's a good hotel valet and harmless but completely nuts.' And when I asked him why, he said, 'Oh, all he does is talk about the good old days and a love affair he had with some dame called Bessie Devine. He says that everybody knew her and she was a big star, but none of the boys around here ever heard of her, and anyway, can you imagine any big star havin' a love affair with an ugly little runt like that?' And then I told him not to tease Lester any more because there once was a big handsome actress called Bessie Devine and that it was true that she'd had a love affair with Lester; but when I got all through, you could see he didn't believe me any more than he'd believed Lester.

"So I sent for Lester and when he saw me he didn't believe it at first and then he turned white and began to shake all over, and then he cried. But I told him it was all right because it had all happened so long ago that it couldn't possibly make any difference except to bring a couple of old men like ourselves both closer together than we had ever been, and that we must be friends because that's what Bessie would have liked more than anything in the world. And so we came to know each other all over again, in a different way. We talked a lot about Bessie but we never talked openly about what had happened between him and her, and presently I began to understand what the effect of the affair on him had been all these years. It wasn't at all what I thought. Because it was the only thing which had ever happened to him all his life and because it was so incredible and tremendous, it seemed to have unsettled his mind. And as he grew older he couldn't think about anything else . . . only just this wonderful thing that had happened to him. And then whenever he got a little acquainted with anybody he'd tell them the story. At first he didn't use her name but when nobody believed him and said, 'Well, if it really hap-

pened to you, what was her name?' he'd tell it, but that only made it worse because then nobody would believe that Bessie Devine whom everybody knew at Rector's and Jack's had ever slept with this ugly little valet. And as the years passed he began to find people who had never even heard of Bessie Devine and, like Jimmy the bellhop, said there wasn't any such person. So it only got worse and worse, until that day he and I found each other again as old men, and after that he didn't care. You see at last, after more than thirty years, he'd found someone who believed his story."

"So that's the end of the story," the old gentleman said. "Lester insists on looking after me just the way he did thirty-five years ago. It makes him kind of happy, so I let him do it."

Just then there was a knock on the door and the old actor said, "Come in." The door opened and in came Lester carrying a worn gray suit on a coat hanger. It was freshly pressed and I understood why the old gentleman always looked so well turned out instead of looking shabby and untidy. I understood too why the room was so neat and spotless. The valet was unmistakably Lester. I never saw an uglier, more misshapen little man.

"Lester," said the old gentleman, "this is a friend of mine. I've just been telling him about Bessie. He's too young to remember her."

Lester gave a slight glance of distaste at the sight of me, sprawled in ungentlemanly fashion on the untidy bed and then said, "Yes, sir. I'm pleased to know you." A light came into the poor little Cockney face. "Bessie, sir. That was a great woman. I think she was the greatest woman I ever knew."

SILENT PARTNER



Irvin S. Cobb

AS THE LADY who had been calling upon him left his office, Mr. Fructor pressed the palms of his hands to his temples and from him there issued sincere moans. Leaving, as she did, in what has often been spoken of, but never adequately described, as a high dudgeon, she punctuated her parting speech with a terrific slam of the door that was like the farewell thunder clap of a violent storm. The calm which followed was as the calm after the storm, and so intense a calm that, by contrast with what had gone before, it seemed almost unnatural.

The above simile will serve further: It is said by returned travelers that frequently, in the exact heart or core of a South Sea typhoon, is a small static area of comparative quiet. Mr. Fructor just now had played the core. All through the late excitement he had cowered in his chair with a fixed and placating smile upon his face, and at intervals uttered little soothing, mooing sounds, while about him the wild and whipping wind of her discontent went swirling, and the forky-tailed lightning of her metaphors played and the drum-drum-drum of her gloved fists on his pounded desk top was as the beat of a tropic downpour.

Immediately, though, that the mistreated door was between them the departing visitor recaptured a more customary mood. Magically and instantaneously the gusty passion lifted from her. With a fluffy pad from her vanity bag she retouched the complexion here and there, and with the tip of a tiny red pencil lined the lips; then, with swift deft movements, did that to her hair which, when a bird does it to its feathers, is known as preening; next then, shook her bracelets, all of them, down into place upon her wrists. Except that

she breathed hard, she was quite altogether her radiant and incomparable self as languidly she moved, outward bound, along the corridor of Fructor & Finn's suite of offices. A moment before she had been flouncing, but now, for her exit, she would float. Her floating exits were nationally admired.

Young Drain, publicity man for the firm, rose to his feet as she came abreast of his room. For ten minutes or more, ever since he returned from luncheon, he had been harkening to the sounds of tumult filtering to where he sat, through two sets of dividing partitions and a cross-hall. But the etiquette of the place demanded of him that he carry on as though he heard nothing and suspected nothing. He hailed her, simulating a pleased surprise at sight of so fair a transient passing his threshold.

"Oh, good afternoon, Miss Palfrey," he said.

She checked, poising lightly in the doorway.

"Oh, good morning," she answered.

Ethically, both of them were right; chronologically, only one. Drain, being newly weaned away from the reporting trade, still thought of tomorrow morning as beginning sometime yesterday evening and lasting until after the last regular city editions of today's morning papers had been succeeded by the first regular morning mail editions of today's evening papers; so to him this present time was approximately two hours past midday of even date. But to members of Miss Palfrey's profession it is always morning until it's almost evening, barring matinee days, when the afternoon properly begins with the rise of the curtain. Happen upon an actor at his club at 3 P.M.—at breakfast—and as he pours out his coffee he bids you a cheerful good morning, but when he rises from the table after finishing, he may remark that it looks as though we might be going to have a nice fair afternoon, after all. For him, the flexible meridian line comes somewhere between the grapefruit and the second poached egg.

"I didn't know you'd dropped in on us," said Drain, still continuing the little pretense of ignorance. "Anything I can do for you, Miss Palfrey?"

"No," she said, and down in her slim lily stem of a throat she laughed in the fluty, gurgling way which, with other charms and other graces, helped so to endear this gifted artist to the paying public. "No, there's nothing you can do for me. But since you mention it, there's something you can do for that fat boss of yours.

You can go on in yonder and fan him with your hat until he comes to."

She lilted again, sweetly, and was gone, leaving behind her in the passage and in the anteroom beyond a haunting whiff of some very expensive and doubtless an imported scent and a memory picture of a beauty confused but glamorous—a glint of spun gold plaits coiled tightly about a gracious little head, a slender swaying body in the blended colors of fine housings, the sheeniness of silken hose, the twinkle of a narrow jeweled anklet seen above the crossed straps of a small, trim street slipper, the assured and level glance out of a pair of the most famous and most glorious brown eyes on this hemisphere; altogether a harmonious vision subtly conveying the conception of a perfect peace of mind, interfluxed with a perfect taste in dress and the superimposed perfections of a placid and a generous nature.

Drain decided to take up the lady's suggestion. As yet, these noteworthy dramatic interludes in the dramatic industry continued to excite his curiosity. Anyhow, he had business with the senior member of the firm. As he entered the presence of his employer, having first rapped for admittance, that gentleman raised his head, showing an apprehensive front and a beaded forehead.

"Uh, so it's you, is it, Drain?" he said. He sighed despondently and yet with relief. "For a minute I thought it maybe might be that Palfrey was coming back again to call me something special extra which she chuss had thought up fresh." He shrugged his hunched shoulders. "You hear it, *huh?*"

"Not being exactly stone deaf, I did," said Drain. "What seems to be ailing our star today?"

"How should I know?" Mr. Fructor waggled his hands in a gesture betokening a state hopeless and helpless. "Temperament, I guess. Maybe she ain't feeling just right when she wakes up today. Maybe she gets brooding about them bum notices she got this here last bust she was in. With me, Drain, what's bygone six weeks already is bygone forever. After we've red-inked a loss of twenty-nine thousand two hundred eight-five for production and costumes and all, off the books, I should try to think about something more pleasant, like maybe a good season this coming fall. Otherwise in this business you regular could go crazy three-four times a year. But her, it's different with. So right away she gets up out of bed in what for her is the middle of the night, pretty near it,

and she puts on a couple hundred thousand dollars' worth of clothes and comes down here and breaks in on me like I ain't got nothing else to worry about only her former troubles, and she rides me the same I am one of these here Coney Island merry-go-rounds.

"Temperament—that's it." Mr. Fructor's tone was rising to a badgered wail, while the perspiration sprayed from him in little freshets. "Do you maybe know, Drain, what is temperament? Well, I'm telling you now what it is. With one of these here high-salaried leading ladies temperament is what temper is with a union bricklayer when he beats up his wife or a policeman or something. For the bricklayer it's sixty days, hard labor, Blackwell's Island, take him away, officer. For the lady it is a chance to have some of these hysterics—and the higher she can sterriek 'em the better it suits her.

"For her it is some poor sucker of a producing manager like me what has got to sit here on a hot day and look pleasant, please, while she is calling me names which, positively, without any question, I give you my woid of honor, Drain, I never even heard some of 'em before, let alone I should know what they mean. Foreign words—get what I mean?—French, maybe. The goil's educated up swell, I got to say that for her. Three separate and distinct languages she speaks in. But that's all I could say for her, absolutely, the way I am feeling toward her now. For my part, she could stick to plain United States and I wouldn't have no trouble figuring out her poisonal feelings. No need she should put herself out my account. . . . Temperament!

"And me, I got to sit and take it and act happy. If it ain't one thing it's yet another. Only yesterday it is Salem coming down and leaning up against me and crying on me until I am all over damp and to get rid of her I would promise anything. That's a good system, too, Drain, if you're a woman star—crying for what you want. And today it is Palfrey with her French swearing words and her roughhouse stuff.

"If ever you yourself should get to be a producing manager, God forbid, don't never make the mistake of tying up with long-term contracts two popular emotional stars. If people should tell you they are the two best women box office attractions in the country and you should get 'em both quick on your string, even if it is true what they say, don't listen to 'em. That's the mistake I made. And now look at me, with the hair turning white on the head from worry before your eyes. What is money in the box office and the

speculators all out front if you must go dippy? There ain't no speculators out front a lunatic asylum, I bet you good money on it!

"If you please one of 'em, which for your part it would be an accident, right away the other one gets jealous. If you please both of them—that's a joke, only, excuse me, I can't laugh—it means you could yourself go broke and crazy the same time doing it. A prospect for a man with a family and a touch of insipid Bright's—*huh?* Most of the time I am wishing they was dead. Then I would be out of their misery and there couldn't no other manager come snooping around trying to grab them off. And all the time I almost am wishing I was dead.

"Ida, she is maybe two years younger than Madge, so naturally Madge has to hate her for that. Madge, she is chuss a little bit the best-looking and gets invited out by swell society people, so Ida, such account, hates Madge something incredible. To each other's face they must smile and be friendly, but behind both of 'em's back I am the punching bag. With one of 'em on our list, like formerly it was, it wouldn't be so bad maybe. But with both of 'em together and especially Palfrey—well from other people's temperament, Drain, I am practically speechless, like what you see me now, Drain.

"Is it my fault them critics this past spring should hand her out roasts? I ask you? Do I own those critics?—a notion! If I owned those critics I would drown 'em and have the reviews all wrote here in the office. Is it my fault the public wouldn't stand for one of them old-fashioned rumantic costume plays which, I told everybody here before even ever we put it on, not only would it flop sure on the road but also the foist night in town? Which it did, didn't it, just like I said? And yet to hear her now, you could easy suppose it's exclusively altogether my fault it ain't all this summer playing Broadway, capacity, sold out eight weeks ahead, S. R. O., even matinee days, unparallel hit, instead of being in the warehouse eating its head off for storage charges—they fancy hangings and that line of expensive periodical clothing, besides one antique tapestry and one lot, four suits of armor for the second-act set, which you remember, Drain, it costs us thirty-nine hundred seventy-five for only chuss those two items alone. And all because it had to be the imported genuwine guaranteed stuff from the time of—time of—" He snapped his fingers petulantly. "What's that foreign sucker's name, Drain—a king or something?"

"Henri Quatre," answered Drain, proud of his French.

"Sure, that's the fellow." Mr. Fructor's voice rose to an indignant squeal. "For second-handed junk from a guy named Ornery Cat—would you believe it's possible?—we must pay out, one lump sum, thirty-nine hundred seventy-five. If you ask me, I say that for the same money we should 'a' got Krazy Kat at the very least. And now then, six weeks after the thing dies on us the death of a dog, I must get blamed by this here Madge Palfrey. Nice—*huh?* Sweet life—yes? No? *No!* And still there's people would tell you us producing managers has got it soft . . . Well, I couldn't sit here all day listening to you, Drain, no matter if you are a bright young fellow. Was there something else, maybe, you wanted to talk to me about it? Otherwise I'm busy."

"Mr. Gibney's secretary called up a few minutes ago," said Drain. "Miss Palfrey was in here with you, so I took the message."

"There's a life wire for you—Pete Gibney!" exclaimed Mr. Fructor, at mention of his favorite dramatist becoming once more an optimist. "A businessman right clear down to the ground and yet as a playwright a sure-fire hit. Well, anyhow, as sure fire a hit as there is in this damn business—say two times out of three he puts it over. That's a high average; I don't kick. Fights with you like tigers over royalties and can himself frame up a better contract than all the lawyers in town, but once that's done you could write your own ticket. Always delivers his script on time, always he's reasonable about cuts, always he's ready to stick in some new lines or a couple new scenes if they would be needed. Well, what's detaining?—why don't you tell me, Drain, what does Gibney have to say?"

"The secretary said to tell you, for him, that the parts for the new piece went to the copyist's this morning, so the whole thing should be ready for you to read by the end of the week."

"Aha, what was I chuss saying? Punctual—that's him! Only, I don't need I should read it but maybe only chuss glance through it. He told me the story—a peach! The lead is a good-looker what has married brilliant—get what I mean?—into the swellest society. But she's got some bad news in her past life. But honest, it ain't her fault. She's unherited them tough habits from her father's side of the family, which they was all a lot of no-good bums. But now she's covering up and getting by with it the best way she can. But always, chuss when her stuff is going over big, some nosy guy what knew her, early times, turns up and starts going round giving every-

body the low-down on the poor dame. Well, that's the way it is. So finally in the fourth act the whole woiks goes blooie on her. The finish is swell. Just before the last curtain she kills herself—suicides—get what I mean? And there you are. Beautiful? *Huh?* . . . Well, did the secretary say something about a title?"

"Yes, he did. I gathered from what he said that you didn't care for the one Gibney suggested when he was in on Monday—*This Mortal Coil*."

"Soitainly I didn't care for it. That's the only thing about it what I don't care for. 'Gibney,' I says to him, 'the public would never care for a play with a name what sounds like something to do with a rope. It ain't got no box office value to it,' I says. 'For Will Rogers, maybe yes. But for us,' I says, 'no!'"

"It's from Shakespeare, you know," said Drain; "part of a line out of Hamlet's soliloquy."

"No, I don't know," said Mr. Fructor, with slight signs of heat. "I ain't got time to know. It's enough I must about once in so often be bunked into losing money reviving this Shakespeare without I should have to rememorize everything he ever wrote. Before now, Drain, I have in my time made successful productions which I couldn't even pronounce 'em. Smart fellows like you and Pete Gibney I could get to do the fancy pronouncing. I ain't no gram-martist, I'm a producing manager. That's what I says to Gibney last Monday when he also mentions Shakespeare. 'Gibney,' I says to him, 'forget this here Hamlet business. With me,' I says, 'that classical stuff, even for a name for a play, is the bunk. Get busy,' I says, 'if you please will be so good, and think me up some titles which up in electric lights on a sign above a theater they should sound like they mean something.'"

"That's what he's done, then," said Drain. "Over the wire I took down these alternative suggestions. Mr. Gibney would be satisfied with either one, his secretary says, but he can't make up his mind which of them he likes better and he wants your judgment." He glanced at a piece of paper in his hand. "One of them is: *Who Giveth This Woman?* and the other is: *The Sins of the Father*."

"I like 'em both; they're catchy—get what I mean? I wish only we could use 'em both——"

Mr. Fructor broke off and his brow clouded. When Mr. Fructor's brow clouded the process was plainly visible, the background being practically hairless. There were sounds of crossing voices without—

that of his partner, Mr. M. A. Finn, uplifted in gentlemanly expostulation, and another—this latter a voice flexible and rich and intoned, with a 'cello note in its deeper inflections and a plaintive liquid sub-quality to it, as though a countless number of unvented sobs ebbed at the base of the owner's throat.

"But, dearie, listen," the pleading Mr. Finn was being heard to say, "I'm givin' you my paralyzed oath you got the wrong steer altogether. It's a dirty shame you should be conned into breakin' off your packin' just when you're fixin' to get away to them cool mountains and come down here in all this hot weather when—"

"Uncle Mikey, it breaks my heart to have to contradict you, but I do know exactly what I'm talking about. I tell you once more that it's a thing which must be settled definitely here and now or—" There was a quick interrupting catch in that heavenly vocalization, the threat of weeping.

The door was thrust open. At sight of her who stood before him, eagerly posed for her entrance, Mr. Fructor shrank back slightly into the loose embraces of a black alpaca coat, used exclusively for office wear. Yet an outsider would have said there was nothing about the newcomer that was calculated to make a man flinch away from her.

On the contrary—oh, most decidedly on the contrary!

Here was indeed an exquisite creature, yet different in all outward respects from the equally personable caller of half an hour gone by. Here were no jingling gauds on wrists or neck, no shrewd comminglings of pastel shades. In the terms of plain black and white and in chaste yielding lines, a wise and beautiful simplicity expressed itself. Shaded under a girlish hat was hair like lustrous ebony; a coloring which explained why roses sometimes hang their heads—'tis in vain envy that they hang them; two great, soft, melting eyes of a prevalent violet, tasseled about with incredibly long lashes. It was Drain's predecessor who had won the unwilling admiration of his brother press agents by getting into print the story that Fructor & Finn had Miss Ida Salem's eyelashes insured against loss or damage in the sum of \$20,000.

This lovely person stayed for a moment framed within the oak casings, thereby gladdening lintel and jamb as ordinary woodwork rarely is gladdened. Then, as she fluttered, rather than walked, to the center of the room, she cried out as though it had been months or at least weeks since she last had seen him: "Oh, you dear Daddy

Fructor!" and snuggled her slim figure against him as he rose from where he sat. Becoming aware of Drain, she gave him the brightest little nod over one shoulder and a greeting:

"Oh, hello, Cousin Ollie!"

They were not cousins, indeed they had known each other for a short time only and purely in their respective professional capacities. But then, Miss Salem claimed a trustful and affectionate relationship with so many. It was as though she would be a little kinfolk body to all the wide and kindly world.

"Am I breaking in on one of those horrid conferences you people down here are always having?" she asked. "Well, I shan't stay long—that is to say, I shan't stay long unless I have to stay long in order to get my just rights. And, anyhow, you're always glad to see me, aren't you, Daddy Fructor?"

He gave a grunt, a somewhat labored and artificial grunt, but meant, evidently, to be accepted as denoting hospitality. One of his welcoming arms had found its way about her, and the uneasy fingers of the hand on that arm began mechanically playing the stops upon a row of fascinating little buttons that ran down her back.

She shook him playfully.

"Now there, I knew you'd be glad, even if that cruel Uncle Mikey there did try to shoo me away." Sidewise, she shot a softly reproachful glance at the impenitent offender who had followed in behind her.

The preliminaries were over; Miss Salem had a canny appreciation of psychologies. She bored straight to actualities:

"Daddy Fructor, Madge Palfrey has just been here. And if you care to know, that's why I'm here again."

"No, now, goilie, now, goilie, no—"

"Why, Daddy Fructor, how can you be such a fibber? Not half an hour ago a little bird called me up on the telephone and whispered to me that she had just that very minute left. What do you say to that?"

For the moment, Mr. Fructor said nothing to that. From his expression, as seen by the two bystanders, it might have been interpreted, though, that if Mr. Fructor found out the identity of the little bird in his employ who had been whispering—and he certainly would try to find out—why then, promptly, he would open the cage and to that particular little bird give, as the saying is, the

air. Looking into his face, they could, in their imaginations, already behold one little bird winging away into the great open spaces, looking for another job.

"Sure, she was here, since you mention it," he admitted in the explicit manner of one whose memory agreeably has just been refreshed. "She did drop in for chuss a little while. That ain't no crime, is it?—paying a sociable visit?"

"Sociable visit—*ha-ha!*" In such a one as this one, all so cuddlesome and artless as she was, shrewishness seemed impossible, yet a mere trace of a sound suggesting the thin and distant humming of a wasp somehow did now, and at times thereafter, creep into the mellow singing tones. "I happen to know, Gus Fructor, that Madge Palfrey was blessing you out for everything she could lay her tongue to, until everybody on this whole floor of this building stopped to listen."

"Well, if she should feel herself a little bit put out about something, am I responsible?"

"Of course not, you old precious! I'm not scolding you, only telling you I heard about everything that occurred, so you needn't waste your breath trying to deceive me. By the merest chance I also happen to know that Peter Gibney has the script for a new play almost ready for you." Mentally, Mr. Fructor wrung the little whispering bird's neck and derived a peculiar personal comfort from so doing. "And yet no longer ago than yesterday, when I was feeling overwrought—when I felt that I must just pour out my soul to somebody and I came down here—*Gus Fructor, for Heaven's sake leave those buttons alone!*—came down here to you, just as a child might come to a parent—*Now you're patting my hand! Don't you see how nervous you're making me when I'm trying to keep my emotions under control?*—came, just as a young daughter might come to her own father, and told you that as a matter of plain justice I expected to have first choice of the first good strong play that you boys might get hold of for the fall, you didn't mention Gibney's name to me once.

"Was that fair? Was that keeping the faith?—when you know Gibney has been just dying for years to furnish me with a suitable starring vehicle? No, you just soothed me down with soft words and vague promises that didn't mean anything. Oh, it's lucky for me I found you out! But I wouldn't have found you out if I hadn't happened to be so fortunate as to have somebody for a friend who

has my best interests at heart—even if you haven't. Oh, darling Daddy Fructor, how—how—how—could you?"

She winked the fringing lashes and two great tears detached themselves from a bottomless reservoir and rolled down those faultless cheeks. She winked again and Mr. Fructor, apprehensive for his crisply starched white linen waistcoat, strove surreptitiously but also unavailingly to draw himself in at the waistline.

"Oh, Daddy Fructor, you of all persons!" It was becoming an agonized outcry.

"But goilie, listen; say, listen here, goilie," he protested. "I pletch you my dying woid Palfrey didn't all the time she was here once mention that Gibney piece. Her being here ain't got nothing to do with you nor Gibney neither. I assure you that."

"Silly! Of course she didn't mention it." Miss Salem lifted her flowered face to his, mastering her agitation. "She wouldn't mention it for a while—she's entirely too deceitful." With a compassionate little intake of the breath she corrected herself. "What I mean to say is that Miss Palfrey is too subtle to come right out and show you what's in her mind, yet. She may sometimes forget she's a lady but she never forgets her own selfish ends. Why, can't you see, you poor stupid things, that this tantrum she had here a little while ago was all carefully worked out beforehand; that she's merely trying to frighten you—intimidate you would be a better word—so as to pave the way to demanding exactly what she wants out of you two boys and, what is more, getting it? Don't you suppose she knows what is afoot? Don't you suppose she has heard about Gibney's play? Do you expect to keep any secrets from certain people? Why, I wouldn't be surprised to learn she actually was paying somebody to keep her privately posted on what goes on inside this office. I've heard of such things being done before now by unscrupulous, conniving, cattish, malicious—"

Again she caught herself up, and from this on her tone was mindfully sympathetic.

"Not that I altogether blame Miss Palfrey. I wouldn't have any of you think that, not for worlds. She's not so young as she was—poor old jealous dear! She must realize that she is losing her following, remembering that distressing failure of hers just a few weeks ago. Still, what could you expect of such an old-fashioned actress in such an old-fashioned piece? Although I always will think that with the lead properly cast the thing might have been pulled

through! She can see that, at her age, it's only a question of a very short time until she must quit playing leads and do minor character roles—mother parts and things like that. So, naturally, she'll fight with any weapons she can lay her hands on. As I say, I don't really blame poor middle-aged Madge Palfrey; but I'm ashamed of you, Daddy Fructor, for not reading her motives better, when they're plain as print.

"I know what the trouble with you boys is! I've always been so open and frank and aboveboard with you, you suppose all other women are the same. Misplaced confidence—that's your trouble. But there, I've said enough about fussy, disagreeable things, haven't I? I think we understand one another, don't we?" She comprehended all three with a confident, slightly tremulous little smile. "I'll be going now. Only, it's agreed, of course, that I am to have the chance to star in Gibney's new play—if I like it and choose to, after reading it? If I don't choose, why, then, that's another matter. But I feel somehow I'm going to like it. I may be too young and too inexperienced to know how to protect myself in this business, but I'm thankful I have a grown-up woman's intuition."

With a seeming reluctance, as though craving the continued pressure of those protecting arms about her, she disengaged herself from Mr. Fructor's somewhat limp and spiritless clasp, and flitted, a graceful black and white butterfly, to the door. There she paused for a brief space, apparently unconscious of the wistful charm of the posture.

"Oh, yes, there was just one thing more—a little teeny-weeny favor! I know you're going to grant it. If I do like the play you'll send the director and the supporting members of my company—after I've passed on who they'll be—up to my camp at Placid, won't you? I live on my nervous resistance, as all of you know. I just couldn't go through the strain of rehearsing here in this stifling, dusty old city; my specialist says I couldn't. Really, it won't be much trouble. They can stay at one of the hotels in the village and motor out to my place every morning. It's only eleven miles and a very good mountain road part of the way. Mind now, that's a promise—I'm going to hold you to it."

She blew innocent kisses at them and was gone from their sight. Down the hallway they could hear her humming a happy, contented snatch of song.

There ensued among those she had quitted a short portentous

silence which ended when Mr. Finn, pursing up his lips, whistled in imitation of a feathered wild-woods songster, at the same time favoring the others present with a slow and an understanding wink.

"I give you right, Mike," assented Mr. Fructor heavily. "Seemingly, what we have been running here, without our knowing it, is a downtown branch, Bronnox Zoo." He emerged from behind his desk and made figurative gestures of rolling up his sleeves. "That one on the switchboard—she's the foist one goes!"

"You'd not can the kid just on suspicion?" asked Mr. Finn.

"Say, Mike, listen—if I was any more suspicious than what now I am, with only my bare hands I would kill that blondine. She's lucky she gets out of here with her life!"

"That can wait—the murderin' can," stated Mr. Finn. "We'll do it together, once we get the guilty gal located. Right now there's something a blamed sight more important for us to be thinkin' about." He grunted mournfully. "I suppose you realize, Gus, that we're in the middle of a blamed serious fix. That there little human cloudburst that just left here, she had the right dope, being smarter in these things than we are. It's a petrified cinch that Palfrey is on to us too, bigger'n a house. Why we went ahead and signed up with Gibney for a single play when, if we'd stopped to think, we might 'a' knowed both them hell-cats would want first grab at it, is what beats me. That ain't all that's got me beat, neither. To begin with, why did we ever hook up with two stars that're so much alike in their work that what fits one for a part will fit the other? If we hand over the Gibney show to Palfrey—and it goes across—why then, Salem will wash the foundations of this building up by the roots and make life a wet misery for the pair of us. If we give it to Salem—and that's what you've already as good as promised to do—we're worse off. Because Palfrey is liable to tear out the office fixtures and throw 'em at us. And there you are, boys!"

"You said sufficient," agreed Mr. Fructor morosely. "You ain't telling me no news whatsoever. Things keep on going this way, what we'll need won't be no office nor no office fixtures neither—chuss a nice padded cell apiece and some paper dolls to play with. One show is all we got to divide between 'em—one show only; but with two swell titles to pick from, I'll say that much." He cheered up slightly as a drowning man might show cheer at a brace of straws within reach. "Let's see, now, one of them titles is called *Who's Giving This Woman Away?*—ain't that a peach,

Finn?—and the other one also is approp—approp—suitable. It's called—"

There was a rapping without on the door panels. In spasmodic rage Mr. Fructor clutched his wilted collar.

"What is this, anyhow?" he demanded. "Grand Central Toiminal?" He raised his choked voice to a satiric roar. "Well, come on in, everybody that ain't already been here! Come right on into the public waiting room and make yourselves at home! Always we are glad here to receive company."

The door was drawn slightly ajar and a redheaded youth showed a cautious face in the cranny.

"'Scuse me, Mr. Fructor," he said apologetically, "but that there Miss Trixie Saybrook is back here again."

"Again? Again?"

"Don't you remember, sir? She's the one was in the other day, askin' would you give her a chance't at the ingénue part in the new Jack Dawson farce. Left her photographs and press notices for you to look at 'em."

"Uh—her? Well, didn't I tell you to tell her she wasn't the type?"

"Yes, sir, you did. And I told her. And she says to tell you how do you know she ain't the type when you ain't never seen her?"

"Because they ain't never the type!" Mr. Fructor threw both his arms aloft in an abandon of rage. "Twenty years, man and beast, have I been in this business and they ain't none of 'em ever the right type. As a favor to me, tell her to go away, quick, please. Tell her I'm in conference. Tell her to go to—"

"Yes, sir, I told her all that. And she says she ain't goin' away. Says she's goin' to stick right there in the outside office till she can talk with somebody besides office boys. Says she supposes that when she starves to death here in Noo York tryin' to get a job, and goes to Heaven, Saint Peter won't let her in because she ain't the type. Says she's gettin' sick and tired of not never bein' the type. Says—"

"That'll do! Drain, would you please go out yonder and talk with this here goil?"

"Yes, Drain," put in Finn, adding a supplementary clause, "tell her we say she's too blamed fresh for her own good."

"Drain, you positively wouldn't do nothing of the sort," snapped Mr. Fructor. "Instead, you should tell her me and Mr. Finn would

ourselves talk with her one half-hour from now. With a good spunky goil like that, Finn, you soitably got to make room for her somewheres."

"Well, but—" began Mr. Finn.

"Listen, I beg you," cried Mr. Fructor, "what am I round here—a silent partner? Couldn't I once in a while get a woid in edgeways? Couldn't I once in a while have my own way about some little something? Drain, go do like what I chuss told you."

Left alone with his partner, Mr. Fructor lost his temporary masterful attitude. Gloom once more enveloped him.

"Where was I at, Mike?" he asked. "Oh, yes." He sighed deeply. "You're younger than what I am, Mike, so maybe you'll be able to stand it a few years longer. But for a man with a blood pressure like I got, what's the chance? I'm asking you? Right now I must run the chance of sunstroke prostrations trying to figure an out for us in this here present situation—two leading ladies and one firm of producers; two poifectly good titles but only one show; the summer going, the fall coming, and pretty soon it would be winter and we—"

He spun about on his heels, swiftly, as dervishes are supposed to spin:

"Mike!" he cried, "an idea comes to me. Listen while I tell it, and don't tell me it's crazy until I'm through telling it. Here's what we do. We let both them goils have the Gibney show. Only, each don't know the other one has got it—get what I mean?"

"No, I'm blamed if I do," said the puzzled Mr. Finn.

"Keep on listening then. Under different titles we get two full sets of script made. We hire two companies—one company for Palfrey, one company for Salem. We hire two directors, one for each. We send one company up yonder to them Adiron—Adiron—them mountains to rehearse with Salem like she herself chuss suggested. Palfrey won't rehearse in town neither when she finds out Salem ain't—she'll yell for the same privileges, too. That's good for us, only we don't let on to her it's good. We'll say since we made an exception in Salem's case we naturally would be quite willing to make exceptions the same for Palfrey.

"She's got a cottage rented down the Joisey coast for the season, ain't she? All right, we ship her company down there to suffer where she is. We don't have no try-outs; this one time, we get along the best we can without any those out-of-town performances.

We keep both companies busy polishing up their lines right up to the very last minute, pretty near it. We hold the dress rehearsals in places two-three hundred miles apart. We don't bring the companies in until late in the afternoon the day they open. And then—follow me close now, Mike—and then on the same night they both open cold at separate theatres here—Salem, say, at the Alcazar, Palfrey at the Fructor, or vicy voisa as the case may be.

"Think of the novelty of it, Mike—think of the talk it'll make! A double-barrel sensation! A riot! The same indetical show opens twice at once, on the same first night, on Broadway—woid for woid, scene for scene, mind you. But the two stars don't know it beforehand and the two companies don't know it, and the critics or the public they don't know it, neither. Not until the next morning or maybe late that night does anybody at all know it, except me and you and maybe one or two others what we got confidences in. Well, Mike, for a swell idea, how does that strike you?"

"Strikes me dumb, mighty near," said the astounded Mr. Finn. "You ain't in earnest, are you?"

"Mike, my boy, only I wish I would be so sure I live to be one hundred as I am I am in earnest now."

"But what's the good of it? We spend all that good money making two separate productions of the one show and yet, even if we could keep the thing a secret right up to the first night, where do we get off?"

"Where do we get off? Once more I ask you, listen." Mr. Fructor gave a fair imitation of a middle-aged, two hundred and forty pound pitcher winding up to deliver a curve ball. "Here's where we get off. If both Palfrey and Salem should flop, it ain't our fault, is it? They had their chance, didn't they? If one of them should flop and the other should go across big, anyhow still we have got us a success running, ain't we? We break fifty-fifty on the investment, don't we?"

"Ye-es, of course—"

"Wait, I ain't through yet. If one flops and the other don't flop, the one which flops would be so sore at herself she would try to take it out on us. Right away she would say that we played a low-down trick on her, wouldn't she? You bet you she would! Doubtless she would try to break off her contract with us, such grounds, and if she couldn't do that it's yet more doubtless she would play off sick and wind up by asking us to release her so she could go

under other management when she gets her health back; which that would be a big favor to us, only naturally, for business reasons, we would act otherwise until after we got rid of her without losses to the firm—get what I mean? Then we wouldn't have the two of 'em on our hands driving us crazy with their w'ims—but only chuss the one. And with one we maybe could get along. Finally, if both of them should make a sensational hit they'll each one be working so hard, trying to outdraw and outlast the other, they won't neither of 'em get time off to be picking on us, the way it is now. Also, in such case, all over the country people will be talking about the firm what had the big idea in the first place. For the free advertising alone I wouldn't take fifty thousand cash."

"But how about Gibney?" asked Mr. Finn, still in the doubtful column. "You can't keep him out of the secret. S'posen now, for instance, that he wouldn't be willin' to stand for all this here monkey business with his play? And even if he would be willin' won't the fact it'll look like, on the surface, that he's wrote two shows for us this season be an awkward thing?—makin' them two dames suspicious, likely as not, and what's just as likely, startin' some of these here talky troupers comparin' notes?"

Mr. Fructor wagged a plump admonishing finger in his associate's face.

"Mike, when did ever you know me to think up the front half of a notion without at the same time or even sooner I hadn't already thought up the last half of it? With one of these fussy young authors maybe it couldn't be done. But with an old experience' head like Pete Gibney and him a smart businessman besides—well, you see for yourself if he don't act reasonable when I have outlined the proposition to him the same as I chuss have to you. Here, right now, I start proving it to you."

He wriggled a globular form between the snug-fitting arms of his swivel chair and lifted the receiver off the prongs of the desk telephone.

"Oh, Boidie?" he said with a dulcet significance. "Is that you, Boidie?"

"What talk have you now?" asked Mr. Finn, astonished. "You know our private exchange gal's name ain't Birdie—it's Sadie."

"Sh-h-h," Mr. Fructor cupped his free hand over the rubber mouthpiece and spoke in an aside. "Even in all this new oxcitement, Finn, I don't forget we got some detectative work to do here."

Watch—I am trying something.” He removed the cupped palm and again put his lips close to the transmitter: “Say, Jennie Wren, if still you feel like doing a little more whispering today, suppose you whisper long distance I would like to speak with Mr. Peter Gibney at his house in Greenwich right away. In case you got so tired from your own private business you forget the number, here it is: Greenwich four *ugh ugh* seven . . . That’s all now, please. Ring me back when you get him—Boidie!”

He replaced the instrument on its hook and readdressed the younger man:

“Give me credit, Mike—even over the wire I could feel that Sadie Fineshrieber jump when I called her by them pet names. . . . Now about Gibney. To begin with, he wants to go away to Europe for a rest—himself, he told me so here last Monday. All right then, with a script from Gibney we know it will be in good shape when he hands it in. Let him go along off to Europe. Then we stick on them two swell titles which he sent ’em in today. We give it out that Palfrey’s new play for this season and also Salem’s new play is both of ’em the works of unnamed authors; or else we stick on for the authors’ names two fancy imagination names which Drain thinks up for us out of his head—whatever Gibney decides is best, we do in this regards. Then, after the first night, if both shows should flop, we let it go at that. But if we got a hit, or by any chance a couple hits, why, we make announcement in the papers that Gibney is really the fellow what wrote the show. One way he gets his regular royalties and the other way he gets double sets of royalties and all for the same job of work. And yet a minute ago you was standing there saying to me maybe Gibney might kick on the idea! *Huh!*”

The telephone tinkled its little bell. Mr. Fructor, by now all humid enthusiasm, snapped up the receiver and thrust it to his ear.

“Gibney?” he called. “Say, is that you, Gibney? . . . Fructor speaking. Say, Gibney, how quick, please, would it take you to get down here to the office? . . . What for? . . . For a very important conference, that’s what for . . . What you say, Gibney? . . . No, I couldn’t tell you over this line what all it’s about. We got too many these here little yellow-headed canaries round here. But say Gibney, listen, believe me, positively you’re going be surprised when I tell you what it is when you get here . . . Hey? . . .

Coming on the five-three? . . . Fine! I assure you, Gibney, you wouldn't never regret it, coming . . . Good-by, Gibney."

Among the Broadway wiseacres—and the Broadway wiseacreage is heavy—there was a synonym: "The luck of a Fructor." It signified a traditional sequence of achievements, seemingly due only to the constancy of a continuing good fortune. To account for the attained prominence of other master showmen there were various popular theories. For each of these the knowing ones had a pet formula.

There was Cabot Endicott Byng, who was so scholarly that the truly cultured patronized his productions on the belief that if he made them they must be worth while. Part of the time the Byng clientele might be puzzled, but all the time it was possessed with a herd-consciousness of its own intellectual superiority. There was Colahan, whose output never was over the heads of the multitude but very often seemed to strike in just at the altitude of their hearts. Some among the special classes called this man vulgar, but meanwhile the masses were fattening his bank account for him.

There was Friedman, of Friedman Brothers, playing the part of a benevolent despot and making it pay; and, coupled with him for the sake of the contrast, was timid-looking little Rupertus, going about his managerial affairs like a small quiet mouse, an ingratiating smile on his face and the air upon him of hoping for just a few of the left-over crumbs of the cheese. There was Firdell, whose word was as good as his bond, but the trouble here was his bond wasn't worth anything. His career had been marked by three lucrative liquidations and one enormous successful bankruptcy. There was Silver, who specialized in what by the terms of the business are called the Home and Mother Brands, and did very well at it, too, possibly because there still were some sentimentalists left in the world—persons who persisted in cherishing such institutions as motherhood and home ties, although by Broadway standards these hopelessly were old-fashioned. There was Splain, personally with very little sex appeal for anyone at all, but managing to pack his plays with a strong line of this commodity.

There was Trinner, who was gifted with an almost superhuman knack for smelling out a failure before ever it failed, and in such cases always could dig up an accommodating being, technically known as an angel, meaning by that the affluent amateur willing

to pay cash, sight unseen, for a slice in a forthcoming dramatic offering. Trinner's private purgatory was full of fallen angels.

And there was Fructor. With puzzled shakes of crafty heads the volunteer diagnosticians said repeatedly they didn't understand how he did it. They just could not see their way clear to giving him endorsement for foresight or for daring or even for an instinctive sapience. They agreed, using the language of the trade, that he got by, dragging his partner along with him, only because he carried a horseshoe in every pocket and wore a necklace of rabbits' feet under his shirt.

Be this as it might have been, it must be set down on the record that in the notable matter of Fructor & Finn's two-starred première of the masquerading drama by Peter Gibney, the proverbial Fructor luck justified its proverbial self. No untimely intimation as to the nature of the contemplated surprises seeped out in advance. They crept in on rubber shoes and burst on an unsuspecting metropolis—*bango!*—at approximately the same hour, to wit, 8:45 P.M. on a given date in the early part of October. By midnight, everybody who stays up until midnight knew, or should have known, of the amazing phenomena that simultaneously had come to pass.

What, for the final editions of the morning papers, otherwise would have been theatrical intelligence became on a sudden Front Page Stuff. For these double-stranded and interlocking openings made news, not meat for bored reviewers to deal with in the stock terms of their jargon, but rather, red and juicy stuff for real reporters to set their eager teeth in. Overnight, with the spread of the tidings, two opposing cliques sprang up—one group being committed to the contention that in the role of Martha Fairways in *The Sins of the Father* Miss Madge Palfrey was unapproachably magnificent, the other equally certain that not for years had an emotional actress scored so pronouncedly a triumph as Miss Ida Salem, playing Martha Fairways in *Who Giveth This Woman?*

Likewise overnight, the town seized on and proceeded to perpetuate a new fad: You bought a pair of tickets for paralleling performances and you divided your evening between them; at the Alcazar Theater you saw Miss Salem for Acts I and II, then, leaving and hurrying to a house four blocks distant, you there saw Miss Palfrey and her supporting company for Acts III and IV; or the reverse way about, according to your own election.

But this is pushing ahead a bit too fast. On the forenoon of the

day following the accouchement of his twin first nights, Mr. Fructor sat at the desk where, back at the beginning, the reader discovered him. For a man whose brain had whelped so original and so epochal a coup, Mr. Fructor appeared strangely out of sorts. With his toe he thrust at a rumple of early afternoon editions which littered the floor about him, as though he were irked by the sight of his own name staring up at him here, and again there, out of blazoning headlines. If ever a kick connoted an abiding depression, this kick did.

At this juncture, while the spurned news sheets still fluttered at his feet, Mr. Finn entered. Here, likewise, was one from whom you would have expected the radiation of a heartsome exuberance. But—most curious of coincidences—he also seemed beset with melancholia. Indeed, he bore himself as a man might who, within his soul, was ridden and roweled by distressing reflections.

He grunted a brief greeting. Mr. Fructor grunted back.

"Passin' Forty-seventh Street I seen a line stretchin' outside the Fructor," announced Mr. Finn, chewing with malignant energy on a defenseless and sodden cigar.

"Treasurer from the Alcazar telephoned in a big advance sale already is started down there," stated Mr. Fructor, but there was no joy in his stating of it.

Like a prisoner in a cell Mr. Finn took short turns to and fro across a rug.

"Mike," said Mr. Fructor irritably, "couldn't please you stop that walking? I am noivous this morning."

"I was just thinkin'," said Mr. Finn.

"I would suggest then you could chuss as easy think setting down." For politeness' sake, presumably, Mr. Fructor followed up the lead: "Well what was you thinking?"

"I was thinkin' that, anyway, there's still somebody round here that's in fifty-fifty on a couple of smashin' knock-outs."

Mr. Fructor gave a violent start.

"What—what—do you mean—somebody round here is in fifty-fifty?" he demanded in a strained voice.

Mr. Finn halted in his tracks. A great guiltiness looked out from his wan eyes.

"Gus, I gotta kind of a confession to make to you. It's like this: That day two months or so ago when you first sprung this here big scheme of yours on me, you kind of swept me off my balance.

So I trailed along with you, just yessin' everything you said. But after we got the thing under way I begun to sort of get cold feet on the whole layout of it. It seemed like it was so—well, so kind of revolutionary. I didn't say nothin' to you, though, about what I had on my mind. It was your suggestion in the first place; it didn't seem like 'twould be right for me to bust up your confidence in your own proposition."

"So-o-o! You was sparing my feelings—*huh?* Well, don't spare 'em no longer. Quit beating round like a bird in the bush and tell me what's the answer."

Being thus brutally prompted, Mr. Finn blurted out his main disclosure:

"Well, to slip you the plain truth, last week I told Jody Silver just what we had afoot—strictly on the dead q.t., of course. And—and I peddled off my interest in the both of these here two shows on to him."

"That was a smartness!" Mr. Fructor shook a condemning hand at the drooped and remorseful figure of his partner. "You should feel proud of yourself."

"I do—about as proud as a guy that's gettin' dressed to go to the electric chair. For my bit—for just my share back out of the total expense—I hand Silver over a half of a property that'll be worth a clean clear seventy-five thousand to him if it's worth a cent!"

"But you shouldn't never 'a' done it!" Mr. Fructor screeched like a flinty slate pencil on a faulty slate. "What business did you have going off by yourself, without advice from nobody, and doing a fool thing like that?"

"Now wait! I ain't tryin' to make excuses for bein' foolish, but if it comes down to the rights of the case, you ain't got no kick comin', Gus. Ain't it always been a rule between us, when we was splittin' even on production costs same as in this case, that either one could get all or any part of his interest underwrote outside the shop so long as 'twas a reputable manager he was dealin' with? Ain't half the firms in town been doin' the same thing for years? Ain't the two of us done it ourselves before, half a dozen times?"

"Tut, tut, tut, tut!" This was Mr. Fructor making clucking sounds against the roof of his mouth.

"Don't set there tuttin' at me like a broke-down switch engine,"

begged the anguished Mr. Finn. "Ain't I feelin' bad enough already without that?"

But Mr. Fructor seemed not to hear him. With sadness, with resignation, he wagged his head. Then, half musingly, as though addressing himself, he murmured a judgment:

"Such a pity it is that, in a firm like this, there shouldn't be somebody what ain't a plum', dam' idiot!"

"Say, hold on!" The worm was beginning to turn. "Don't rub it in."

"I am not rubbing it in, Mike," said Mr. Fructor gently.

"What's the reason you ain't—callin' me an idiot?"

"Mike, when I use those woids I am not altogether thinking of you alone. I am thinking in partnership terms—get what I mean? In fact, Mike, I am thinking close to home." He patted himself on the bosom. "Mike, an honest confession also is sauce for the gander. Now, I tell you something: I been sitting here since long before you come, thinking how I would break it to you. Mike, I got cold feet, chuss the same as you did. Only, I didn't get mine until after I seen Salem at the dress rehearsal night before last up at Rochester. I give her woik the once-over and to me it seemed like if she sure would be a flop. I didn't get such good reports from the Palfrey outfit, neither. Coming back on the sleeper I begun thinking, same as what you did, that the untire proposition was too revolu—revolu—unregular. I couldn't sleep a wink. So—listen, Mike—yesterday morning I slipped out and I sold outright my fifty percents to Sol Goldrimmer, of Goldrimmer & Glick. I got his certified check here in my vest pocket, and I assure you, Mike, it weighs now like lead on my heart."

For a pregnant quarter-minute Mr. Finn, before speaking, stared at his woe-stricken partner.

"Then, the way it stands, we've both unloaded, and all we get for ourselves out of what's goin' to be one of the biggest hits of the season—two of the biggest hits, I should say—is the trouble we've went through and the pleasure of bein' known as the original producers?"

"You said it all." Mr. Fructor shrugged in the manner of one clearing his shoulders of a load. "Well, in this business, Mike, we got to be good gamblers. If you couldn't be a sport you might chuss as well shut up shop and get out of it—*huh?* I'm asking you? Be-

sides, in every cloud we should look for the golden eggs." He summoned up the wraith of a philosophic smile. "We don't have to worry a while about them two goils—they'll be busy all this coming year trying to cut each other's throat. And it ain't like we didn't have no other hits on. That there young Trixie Saybrook, which you remember I picked her up, absolutely unknown, is running away with the Dawson farce. And the new musical show is doing for us eighteen thousand a week—don't forget that!"

"That's so," assented Mr. Finn, and shook himself as though to get rid of the plaguing little jockeys of regret that had bestraddled him.

Mr. Fructor continued:

"Anyway, Mike, I been thinking to myself here of late that it's about time we was easing ourselves up on these here trashy modern dramas of the Gibney school and go in once in a while at least for something which you might say it's really artistic."

"Where d'ye get that Gibney school stuff?" asked Mr. Finn. "What highbrow nut have you been listenin' to now?"

"Not none, I assure you. It's practically exclusively all my own idea, Mike. What you say that between now and Christmas we make a real, modern, high-grade, number one, up-to-the-minute production of—*Hamlet*?"

"*Hamlet*! Well, for the love of—" Language failed the dumfounded Mr. Finn.

"It's been a success from away back, ain't it? It ain't like we're taking chances on something which ain't ever been tried out."

"I ain't kickin' on the play itself—understand," Mr. Finn hastened to explain. "It takes all sorts of people to make up the world and for them that likes that kind of a thing, why, that's the kind of a thing they likes. But what's got me wingin' in my own mind is guessin' out how you ever come to light on to *Hamlet*?"

"I'll tell you how. Back yonder the end of August—by Chove, I remember now! It was the same indential day when I had the big notion—yes sir, back yonder that very day in August, something which Drain said here in this office got me thinking about that play *Hamlet*." He grinned, rather shyly. "I sent out for a copy. Here it is now—" He rummaged in a desk drawer and produced a volume from a set of one of the standard editions of the Bard's complete works.

"And you been readin' it, I s'pose, on the sly?"

"God forbid! Look at it, how many pages it is, all fine print, too! It's enough the actors we hire it should read it; that's their business. I only glanced through the list of characters—that's sufficient."

"Well, who've you got in mind for Hamlet?"

"A question? We could get Hamlets like flies. Every sterling actor in the world—and plenty actresses—thinks they can play Hamlet. They got Hamlet on the brain—them that's got a brain. We could try out a new Hamlet every Monday night and in a whole year solid I bet you we wouldn't once run out of a steady supply. What I have been thinking about on the private, Mike, is the right parties for some of the other parts. Very quiet I've been looking round. Right now I got my eye on two boys. You wouldn't know 'em—a talking act in vaudeville. But you'd like 'em—good, smart, funny boys. And, Mike, they got a line of this here Yiddish patter which it would make you laugh your sides off to hear 'em. Nice boys, too. I went back behind after they come off the other night and talked with 'em."

"You mean Hebrew impersonators?" Mr. Finn's jaw dropped in amazement on the question.

"Yes—I should say, no," Mr. Fructor corrected himself swiftly. "These boys don't need to impersonate—they already are!"

"But what talk have you—there can't be no place in *Hamlet* for a team of Jew boys?"

"Is that so?" Mr. Fructor wagged his head sagely. "Since you then are so wise, would you please be so good and read what it says in the book?"

He turned the forward leaves and found a certain page. His forefinger ran down the printed lines. "Ah-h—see it here, Mr. Know-it-all—'Rosencrantz' foist, and chuss below him, 'Guildenstern.'"

"Well, what d'ye know about that!" said Mr. Finn, wonderment in his tone mingling with conviction. "Lemme look at it myself." He possessed himself of the volume. "And say, looky here, Gus, right up above them two is 'Cornelius.'" With racial pride his voice rose: "Guess you know, without my tellin' you, what fighting nation that there name Cornelius comes from? All three of 'em set down as 'Courtiers,' too—guess that means they work in a courtroom scene. Well, say, who'd 'a' thought it, that away back yonder a hundred years ago or maybe a hundred and fifty

years, for all I know, when old man Shakespeare was alive and kickin', they was stickin' Irish and Jew comedy bits into straight shows. Well, it only goes to prove there's nothin' new under the sun, not even in the show business, eh, partner?"

"Except the idea of opening two temperamental stars the same night in the same show the same town," said Mr. Fructor softly. "For that, Mike, I would ask the credit—since we ain't neither one of us going to take down none the cash!"

CHEAP EXCURSION



Noel Coward

JIMMY SAID, "Good night, Miss Reed," as she passed him in the passage. He did it ordinarily, no overtones or undertones, not the slightest indication of any secret knowledge between them, not even a glint in his eye, nothing beyond the correct subservience of an assistant stage manager to a star. She answered him vaguely, that well-known gracious smile, and went on to the stage-door, her heart pounding violently as though someone had sprung at her out of the dark.

In the car, she sat very still with her hands folded in her lap, vainly hoping that this very stillness, this stern outward quietness might help to empty her mind. Presently she gave up and watched herself carefully taking a cigarette out of her case and lighting it. "I am Diana Reed. *The* Diana Reed, lighting a cigarette. I am Diana Reed driving home in my expensive car to my expensive flat—I am tired after my performance and as I have a matinee tomorrow it is sane and sensible for me to go straight home to bed after the show. I am having supper with Jimmy tomorrow night and probably Friday night, too—there are hundreds of other nights and there is no reason whatsoever for me to feel lonely and agonized and without peace. I am Diana Reed—I am celebrated, successful, sought after—my play is a hit—my notices were excellent—except

the *Sunday Times*. I am Diana Reed, famous, nearing forty and desperate. I am in love, not perhaps really in love like I was with Tony, nor even Pierre Chabron, but that was different, because it lasted such a little time and was foreign and mixed up with being abroad and everything, but I am in love all right and it's different again, it's always different and always difficult, and I wish to God I could be happy with it and give up to it, but there's too much to remember and too much to be careful of and too many people wanting to find out about it and gossip and smear it with their dirty fingers."

She let down the window and flicked her cigarette onto the pavement. It fell at the feet of a man in a mackintosh and a bowler hat; he looked up quickly and she drew herself back guiltily into the corner of the car. When she let herself into her flat and switched on the lights in the sitting room its smug tidy emptiness seemed to jeer at her. It was a charming room. The furniture was good, plain and luxuriously simple in line. There was the small Utrillo that Tony had given her so many years ago—it had been in her flat in Cavendish Street for ages, and she had even taken it on tour with her. That sharp sunny little street with the pinkish-white walls and neat row of plane trees making shadows across the road. The only other picture in the room was a Marie Laurencin of a woman in a sort of turban. It was quite small and framed in glass. That she had bought herself a couple of years ago when she was in Paris with Barbara and Nicky. Nicky said it looked like a very pale peach with currants in it.

She pitched her hat onto the sofa where it lay looking apologetic, almost cringing, and went over and opened the window. Outside it was very quiet, only dark rooftops and an occasional light here and there, but there was a glow in the sky over Oxford Street, and she could hear the noise of traffic far away muffled by the houses and squares in between. Just round the corner in George Street she heard a taxi stop, the slam of its door and the sharp ping as the driver shut off the motor. It might so easily be Jimmy, knowing that she was coming home alone, knowing how happy it would make her if he just came along for ten minutes to say good night. The taxi with a grind of its gears started up and drove away, she could hear it for quite a while until there was silence again. It might still be Jimmy, he wouldn't be so extravagant as to keep a taxi waiting—he might at this very moment be coming up in the lift. In a

few seconds she would hear the lift door opening and then the front-door bell. She listened, holding her breath. He might, of course, come up the stairs in order not to be seen by the liftman. Jimmy was nothing if not cautious. She waited, holding onto the windowsill tight to prevent herself from going to the front door. There was no sound, and presently her tension relaxed and, after rather a disdainful glance at herself in the glass over the mantelpiece, she went and opened the front door anyhow. The landing was deserted. When she came back into the room again she discovered, to her great irritation, that she was trembling.

She sat on a chair by the door, bolt upright, like somebody in a dentist's waiting room. It wouldn't have surprised her if a bright, professionally smiling nurse had suddenly appeared and announced that Doctor Martin was ready for her. Again she folded her hands in her lap. Someone had once told her that if you sat still as death with your hands relaxed, all the vitality ran out of the ends of your fingers and your nerves stopped being strained and tied up in knots. The Frigidaire in the kitchen suddenly gave a little click and started whirring. She stared at various things in the room, as though by concentrating, identifying herself with them she could become part of them and not feel so alone. The pickled wood Steinway with a pile of highly colored American tunes on it; the low table in front of the fire with last week's *Sketch* and *Bystander*, and the week before last's *New Yorker*, symmetrically arranged with this morning's *Daily Telegraph* folded neatly on top; the Chinese horse on the mantelpiece, very aloof and graceful with its front hoof raised as though it were just about to stamp on something small and insignificant. Nicky had said it was "Ming" and Eileen had sworn it was "Sung" because she had once been to China on a cruise and became superior at the mention of anything remotely oriental.

There had been quite a scene about it culminating in Martha saying loudly that she'd settle for it being "Gong" or "Pong" if only everybody would bloody well shut up arguing and give her a drink.

Diana remembered how Jimmy had laughed, he was sitting on the floor next to Barbara. She looked at the empty space in front of the fireplace and saw him clearly, laughing, with his head thrown back and the firelight shining on his hair. That was during rehearsals, before anything had happened, before the opening night in Manchester and the fatal supper party at the Midland, when

he had come over from his party at the other end of the French restaurant to tell her about the rehearsal for cuts the next afternoon. She remembered asking him to sit down and have a glass of champagne, and how politely he had accepted with a rather quizzical smile, almost an air of resignation. Then the long discussion about Duse and Bernhardt, and Jonathan getting excited and banging the table, and Jimmy sitting exactly opposite her where she could watch him out of the corner of her eye, listening intently to the conversation and twiddling the stem of his wineglass. They had all been dressed, of course. Jonathan and Mary had come up from London especially for the first night, also Violet and Dick and Maureen. Jimmy was wearing a gray flannel suit and a blue shirt and navy blue tie; occasionally the corners of his mouth twitched as though he were secretly amused, but didn't want to betray it. Then he had caught her looking at him, raised his eyebrows just for the fraction of a second and, with the most disarming friendliness, patted her hand. "You gave a brilliant performance tonight," he said. "I felt very proud to be there." That was the moment. That was the spark being struck. If she had had any sense she'd have run like a stag, but instead of running, instead of recognizing danger, there she had sat idiotically smiling, warmed and attracted. Not content with having had a successful first night and having given a good performance, not satisfied with the fact that her friends, her close intimate friends, had trailed all the way from London to enjoy her triumph with her, she had had to reach out greedily for something more. Well, God knows she'd got it all right. Here it was, all the fun of the fair. The fruits of those few weeks of determined fascination. She remembered, with a slight shudder, how very much at her best she had been, how swiftly she had responded to her new audience, this nice-looking, physically attractive young man at least ten years younger than herself. How wittily she had joined in the general conversation. She remembered Jonathan laughing until he cried at the way she had described the dress rehearsal of *Lady from the East*, when the Japanese bridge had broken in the middle of her love scene. All the time, through all the laughter, through all the easy intimate jokes, she had had her eye on Jimmy, watching for his response, drawing him into the circle, appraising him, noting his slim wrists, the way he put his head on one side when he asked a question, his eyes, his thick eyelashes, his wide square shoulders. She remembered saying "good

night" to him with the others as they all went up in the lift together. Her suite was on the second floor, so she got out first. He was up on the top floor somewhere, sharing a room with Bob Harley, one of the small-part actors. She remembered, also, looking at herself in the glass in her bathroom and wondering, while she creamed her face, how attractive she was to him really, or how much of it was star glamour and position. Even then, so early in the business, she had begun to doubt. It was inevitable, of course, that doubt, particularly with someone younger than herself, more particularly still when that someone was assistant stage manager and general understudy. A few days after that, she had boldly asked him to supper in her suite. She remembered at the time being inwardly horrified at such flagrant indiscretion; however, no one had found out or even suspected. He accepted with alacrity, arrived a little late, having had a bath and changed his suit, and that was that.

Suddenly, the telephone bell rang. Diana jumped, and with a sigh of indescribable relief went into her bedroom to answer it. Nobody but Jimmy knew that she was coming home early—nobody else would dream of finding her in at this time of night. She sat on the edge of the bed just in order to let it ring once more, just to give herself time to control the foolish happiness in her voice. Then she lifted the receiver and said "Hallo," in exactly the right tone of politeness only slightly touched with irritation. She heard Martha's voice at the other end, and the suddenness of the disappointment robbed her of all feeling for a moment. She sat there rigid and cold with a dead heart. "My God," Martha was saying, "you could knock me down with a crowbar, I couldn't be more surprised. I rang up Jonathan and Barbara and Nicky, and finally the Savoy Grill—this is only a forlorn hope—I never thought for a moment you'd be in." Diana muttered something about being tired and having a matinee tomorrow, her voice sounded false and toneless. Martha went on. "I don't want to be a bore, darling, but Helen and Jack have arrived from New York, and they're leaving on Saturday for Paris, and they've been trying all day to get seats for your show, and the nearest they could get was the fourteenth row, and I wondered if you could do anything about the house seats." With a great effort Diana said: "Of course, darling, I'll fix it with the box office tomorrow." "You're an angel—here are Helen and Jack,

they want to say 'Hullo.' " There was a slight pause, then Helen's husky southern voice: "Darling—"

Diana put her feet up and lay back on the bed, this was going to be a long business. She was in command of herself again, she had been a fool to imagine it was Jimmy, anyhow; he never telephoned unless she asked him to, that was one of the most maddening aspects of his good behavior. Good behavior to Jimmy was almost a religion. Excepting when they were alone together, he never for an instant betrayed by the flicker of an eyelash that they were anything more than casual acquaintances. There was no servility in his manner, no pandering to her stardom. On the contrary the brief words he had occasion to speak to her in public were, if anything, a trifle brusque, perfectly polite, of course, but definitely without warmth. Helen's voice went on. She and Jack had had a terrible trip on the *Queen Mary*, and Jack had been sick as a dog for three whole days. Presently Jack came to the telephone and took up the conversation where Helen had left off. Diana lay still, giving a confident, assured performance, laughing gaily, dismissing her present success with just enough disarming professional modesty to be becoming. "But, Jack dear, it's a marvelous part—nobody could go far wrong in a part like that. You wait until you see it—you'll see exactly what I mean. Not only that, but the cast's good too, Ronnie's superb. I think it's the best performance he's given since *The Lights Are Low*, and, of course, he's heaven to play with. He does a little bit of business with the breakfast tray at the beginning of the third act that's absolutely magical. I won't tell you what it is, because it would spoil it for you, but just watch out for it— No, dear, I can't have supper tomorrow night—I've a date with some drearies that I've already put off twice—no, really, I couldn't again—how about lunch on Friday? You'd better come here and bring old Martha too—all right—it's lovely to hear your voice again. The seats will be in your name in the box office tomorrow night. Come backstage afterwards, anyhow, even if you've hated it—good-by!"

Diana put down the telephone and lit a cigarette, then she wrote on the pad by the bed: *Reminder fix house seats, Jack and Helen.* Next to the writing-pad was a thermos jug of Ovaltine left for her by Dora. She looked at it irritably and then poured some out and sipped it.

Jimmy had probably gone straight home. He generally did. He wasn't a great one for going out, and didn't seem to have many friends except, of course, Elsie Lumley, who'd been in repertory with him, but that was all over now and she was safely married, or was she? Elsie Lumley, judging from what she knew of her, was the type that would be reluctant to let any old love die, married or not married. Elsie Lumley! Pretty, perhaps rather overvivacious, certainly talented. She'd be a star in a year or two if she behaved herself. The picture of Elsie and Jimmy together was unbearable—even though it all happened years ago—it *had* happened and had gone on for quite a long while, too. Elsie lying in his arms, pulling his head down to her mouth, running her fingers through his hair— Diana put down the cup of Ovaltine with a bang that spilt a lot of it into the saucer. She felt sick, as though something were dragging her heart down into her stomach. If Jimmy had gone straight home he'd be in his flat now, in bed probably, reading. There really wasn't any valid reason in the world why she shouldn't ring him up. If he didn't answer, he was out, and there was nothing else to do about it. If he was in, even if he had dropped off to sleep, he wouldn't really mind her just ringing up to say good night.

She put out her hand to dial his number, then withdrew it again. It would be awful if someone else was there and answered the telephone, not that it was very likely, he only had a bed-sitting-room, but still he might have asked Bob Harley or Walter Grayson home for a drink. If Walter Grayson heard her voice on the telephone it would be all over the theatre by tomorrow evening. He was one of those born theatrical gossips, amusing certainly, and quite a good actor, but definitely dangerous. She could, of course, disguise her voice. Just that twang of refined cockney that she had used in *The Short Year*. She put out her hand again, and again withdrew it. "I'll have another cigarette and by the time I've smoked it, I shall decide whether to ring him up or not." She hoisted herself up on the pillow and lit a cigarette, methodically and with pleasure. The ache had left her heart and she felt happier—unaccountably so, really; nothing had happened except the possibility of action, of lifting the receiver and dialing a number, of hearing his voice—rather sleepy, probably—saying: "Hallo, who is it?" She puffed at her cigarette luxuriously watching the smoke curl up into the air. It was blue when it spiraled up from the end of the cigarette and gray when she blew it out of her mouth. It might, of course, irritate

him being rung up, he might think she was being indiscreet or tiresome or even trying to check up on him: trying to find out whether he'd gone straight home, and whether he was alone or not.

How horrible if she rang up and he wasn't alone: if she heard his voice say, just as he was lifting the receiver: "Don't move, darling, it's probably a wrong number," something ordinary like that, so simple and so ordinary, implying everything, giving the whole game away. After all, he was young and good-looking, and they had neither of them vowed any vows of fidelity. It really wouldn't be so surprising if he indulged in a little fun on the side every now and then. Conducting a secret liaison with the star of the theatre in which you work must be a bit of a strain from time to time. A little undemanding, light, casual love with somebody else might be a relief.

Diana crushed out her cigarette angrily, her hands were shaking and she felt sick again. She swung her legs off the bed and, sitting on the edge of it, dialed his number viciously, as though she had found him out already; caught him red-handed. She listened to the ringing tone, it rang in twos—*brrr-brrr—brrr-brrr*. The telephone was next to his bed, that she knew, because once when she had dropped him home he had asked her in to see his hovel. It was a bed-sitting room on the ground floor in one of those small, old-fashioned streets that run down to the river from John Street, Adelphi . . . *brr-brr—brr-brrr*—she might have dialed the wrong number. She hung up and then redialed it, again the ringing tone, depressing and monotonous. He was out—he was out somewhere—but where could he possibly be? One more chance, she'll call the operator and ask her to give the number a special ring, just in case there had been a mistake.

The operator was most obliging, but after a few minutes her voice, detached and impersonal, announced that there was no reply from the number and that should she call again later? Diana said no, it didn't matter, she'd call in the morning. She replaced the receiver slowly, wearily, as though it were too heavy to hold any longer, then she buried her face in her hands.

Presently she got up again and began to walk up and down the room. The bed, rumpled where she had lain on it, but turned down, with her nightdress laid out, ready to get into, tortured her with the thought of the hours she would lie awake in it. Even medinal, if she were stupid enough to take a couple of tablets before

a matinee, wouldn't be any use tonight. That was what was so wonderful about being in love, it made you so happy! She laughed bitterly aloud and then caught herself laughing bitterly aloud and, just for a second, really laughed. Just a grain of humor left after all. She stopped in front of a long glass and addressed herself in a whisper, but with clear, precise enunciation as though she were trying to explain something to an idiot child. "I don't care," she said, "I don't care if it's cheap or humiliating or unwise or undignified or mad, I'm going to do it, so there. I'm going to do it now, and if I have to wait all night in the street I shall see him, do you understand? I shall see him before I go to sleep, I don't mind if it's only for a moment, I shall see him. If the play closes tomorrow night. If I'm the scandal of London. If the stars fall out of the sky. If the world comes to an end! I shall see him before I go to sleep tonight. If he's alone or with somebody else. If he's drunk, sober or doped, I intend to see him. If he is in and his lights are out I shall bang on the window until I wake him and if, when I wake him, he's in bed with man, woman or child, I shall at least know. Beyond arguments and excuses I shall *know*. I don't care how foolish and neurotic I may appear to him. I don't care how high my position is, or how much I trail my pride in the dust. What's position anyway, and what's pride? To hell with them. I'm in love and I'm desperately unhappy. I know there's no reason to be unhappy, no cause for jealousy and that I should be ashamed of myself at my age, or at any age, for being so uncontrolled and for allowing this Goddamned passion or obsession or whatever it is to conquer me, but there it is. It can't be helped. No more fighting—no more efforts to behave beautifully. I'm going to see him—I'm going now—and if he is unkind or angry and turns away from me I shall lie down in the gutter and howl."

She picked up her hat from the sofa in the sitting room, turned out all the lights, glanced in her bag to see if she had her keys all right and enough money for a taxi, and went out onto the landing, shutting the door furtively behind her. She debated for a moment whether to ring for the lift or slip down the stairs, finally deciding on the latter as it would be better on the whole if the liftman didn't see her. He lived in the basement and there was little chance of him catching her unless by bad luck she happened to coincide with any of the other tenants coming in. She got out into the street unobserved and set off briskly in the direction of Orchard Street.

It was a fine night, fortunately, but there had been rain earlier on and the roads were shining under the lights. She waited on the corner of Orchard Street and Portman Square for a taxi that came lolling toward her from the direction of Great Cumberland Place. She told the driver to stop just opposite the Little Theatre in John Street, Adelphi, and got in. The cab smelt musty and someone had been smoking a pipe in it. On the seat beside her something white caught her eye; she turned it over gingerly with her gloved hand, and discovered that it was a program of her own play, with a large photograph of herself on the cover. She looked at the photograph critically. The cab was rattling along Oxford Street now, and the light was bright enough. The photograph had been taken a year ago in a Molyneux sports dress and small hat. It was a three-quarter length and she was sitting on the edge of a sofa, her profile half turned away from the camera. She looked young in it, although the poise of the head was assured, perhaps a trifle too assured. She looked a little hard too, she thought, a little ruthless. She wondered if she was, really. If this journey she was making now, this unwise, neurotic excursion, merely boiled down to being an unregenerate determination to get what she wanted, when she wanted it, at no matter what price. She thought it over calmly, this business of being determined. After all, it was largely that, plus undoubted talent and personality, that got her where she was today. She wondered if she were popular in the theatre. She knew the stage hands liked her, of course, they were easy; just remembering to say "thank you," when any of them held open a door for her or "good evening," when she passed them on the stage was enough—they were certainly easy because their manners were good, and so were hers; but the rest of the company—not Ronnie, naturally, he was in more or less the same position as herself; the others, little Cynthia French, for instance, the ingenue, did she hate her bitterly in secret? Did she envy her and wish her to fail? Was all that wide-eyed, faintly servile eagerness to please merely masking an implacable ambition, a sweet, strong, female loathing? She thought not on the whole, Cynthia was far too timid a creature, unless, of course, she was a considerably finer actress off the stage than she was on. Walter Grayson, she knew, liked her all right. She'd known him for years, they'd been in several plays together. Lottie Carnegie was certainly waspish at moments, but only with that innate defensiveness of an elderly actress who hadn't quite achieved what

she originally set out to achieve. There were several of them about, old-timers without any longer much hope left of becoming stars, but with enough successful work behind them to assure their getting good character parts. They all had their little mannerisms and peculiarities and private fortresses of pride. Lottie was all right really, in fact as far as she, Diana, was concerned she was all sweetness and light, but, of course, that might be because she hated Ronnie. Once, years ago apparently, he had been instrumental in having her turned down for a part for which he considered her unsuitable. The others liked her well enough, she thought, at least she hoped they did; it was horrid not to be liked; but she hadn't any illusions as to what would happen if she made a false step. This affair with Jimmy, for example. If that became known in the theatre the whole of London would be buzzing with it. She winced at the thought. That would be horrible. Once more, by the light of a street lamp at the bottom of the Haymarket, she looked at the photograph. She wondered if she had looked like that to the man with the pipe to whom the program had belonged; whether he had taken his wife with him or his mistress; whether they'd liked the play and cried dutifully in the last act, or been bored and disappointed and wished they'd gone to a musical comedy. How surprised they'd be if they knew that the next person to step into the taxi after they'd left was Diana Reed, Diana Reed herself, the same woman they had so recently been applauding, as she bowed and smiled at them in that shimmering silver evening gown—that reminded her to tell Dora at the matinee tomorrow that the paillettes where her cloak fastened were getting tarnished and that she must either ring up the shop or see if Mrs. Blake could deal with it in the wardrobe.

The taxi drew up with a jerk opposite to the Little Theatre. Diana got out and paid the driver. He said: "Good night, miss," and drove away down the hill, leaving her on the edge of the curb feeling rather dazed, almost forgetting what she was there for. The urgency that had propelled her out of her flat and into that taxi seemed to have evaporated somewhere between Oxford Street and here. Perhaps it was the photograph on the program, the reminder of herself as others saw her, as she should be, poised and well dressed with head held high, not in contempt, nothing supercilious about it, but secure and dignified, above the arena. Those people who had taken that taxi, who had been to the play—

how shocked they'd be if they could see her now, not just standing alone in a dark street, that wouldn't of course shock them particularly, merely surprise them; but if they could know, by some horrid clairvoyance, why she was here. If, just for an instant, they could see into her mind. Diana Reed, that smooth, gracious creature whose stage loves and joys and sorrows they had so often enjoyed, furtively loitering about in the middle of the night in the hopes of spending a few minutes with a comparatively insignificant young man whom she liked going to bed with. Diana resolutely turned in the opposite direction from Jimmy's street and walked round by the side of the Tivoli into the Strand. Surely it was a little more than that? Surely she was being unnecessarily hard on herself. There was a sweetness about Jimmy, a quality apart from his damned sex appeal. To begin with, he was well bred, a gentleman. (What a weak, nauseating alibi, as though that could possibly matter one way or the other and yet, of course, it did.) His very gentleness, his strict code of behavior. His fear, so much stronger even than hers, that anyone should discover their secret. Also he was intelligent, infinitely more knowledgeable and better read than she. All that surely made a difference, surely justified her behavior a little bit? She walked along the Strand toward Fleet Street, as though she were hurrying to keep an important appointment. There were still a lot of people about and on the other side of the street two drunken men were happily staggering along with their arms round each other's necks, singing "Ramona." Suddenly to her horror she saw Violet Cassel and Donald Ross approaching her, they had obviously been supping at the Savoy and decided to walk a little before taking a cab. With an instinctive gesture she jammed her hat down over her eyes and darted into Heppell's, so quickly that she collided with a woman who was just coming out and nearly knocked her down. The woman said, "Christ, a fugitive from a chain gang?" and waving aside Diana's apologies, went unsteadily into the street. Diana, faced with the inquiring stare of the man behind the counter and slightly unhinged by her encounter in the doorway, and the fact that Donald and Violet were at that moment passing the shop, racked her brains for something to buy. Her eyes lighted on a bottle of emerald green liquid labeled *Ess Viotto for the hands*. "I should like that," she said, pointing to it. The man, without looking at her again, wrapped it up and handed it to her. She paid for it and went out of the shop. Violet and Donald

were crossing over farther down. She walked slowly back the way she had come. An empty taxi cruising along close to the curb passed her and almost stopped. She hailed it, gave the driver her address, got in and sank thankfully back on to the seat. "A fugitive from a chain gang." She smiled and closed her eyes for a moment. "What an escape!" She felt utterly exhausted as if she had passed through a tremendous crisis, she was safe, safe as houses, safe from herself and humiliation and indignity. No more of such foolishness. She wondered whether or not she had replaced the stopper in the thermos. She hoped she had, because the prospect of sitting up, snug in bed, with a mind at peace and a cup of Ovaltine seemed heavenly. She opened her eyes as the taxi was turning into Lower Regent Street and looked out of the window. A man in a camel-hair coat and a soft brown hat was waiting on the corner to cross the road. Jimmy! She leaned forward hurriedly and tried to slide the glass window back in order to tell the driver to stop, but it wouldn't budge. She rapped on the glass violently. The driver looked round in surprise and drew into the curb. She was out on the pavement in a second, fumbling in her bag. "I've forgotten something," she said breathlessly. "Here"—she gave him half a crown and turned and ran toward Jimmy. He had crossed over by now and was just turning into Cockspur Street. She had to wait a moment before crossing because two cars came by and then a bus. When she got round the corner she could still see him just passing the lower entrance to the Carlton. She put on a great spurt and caught up with him just as he was about to cross the Haymarket. He turned his head slightly just as she was about to clutch at his sleeve. He was a pleasant-looking young man with fair hair and a little mustache. Diana stopped dead in her tracks and watched him cross the road, a stream of traffic went by and he was lost to view. She stood there trying to get her breath and controlling an overpowering desire to burst into tears. She stamped her foot hard as though by so doing she could crush her agonizing, bitter disappointment into the ground.

A passing policeman looked at her suspiciously, so she moved miserably across the road and walked on toward Trafalgar Square, past the windows of the shipping agencies filled with smooth models of ocean liners. She stopped at one of them for a moment and rested her forehead against the cold glass, staring at a white steamer with two yellow funnels; its decks meticulously scrubbed

and its paintwork shining in the light from the street lamps. Then, pulling herself together, she set off firmly in the direction of the Adelphi. No use dithering about any more. She had, in leaving the flat in the first place, obeyed an irresistible, but perfectly understandable impulse to see Jimmy. Since then, she had hesitated and vacillated and tormented herself into a state bordering on hysteria. No more of that, it was stupid, worse than stupid, this nerve-racking conflict between reason and emotion was insane. Reason had done its best and failed. No reason in the world could now woo her into going back to that empty flat without seeing Jimmy. Fate had ranged itself against reason. If Fate hadn't dressed that idiotic young man with a mustache in Jimmy's camel-hair coat and Jimmy's hat, all would have been well. If Fate had arbitrarily decided, as it apparently had, that she was to make a fool of herself, then make a fool of herself she would. Jimmy was probably fast asleep by now and would be furious at being awakened. She was, very possibly, by this lamentable, silly behavior, about to wreck something precious, something which, in future years, she might have been able to look back upon with a certain wistful nostalgia. Now of course, after she had observed Jimmy's irritation and thinly-veiled disgust, after he had kissed her and confronted her and packed her off home in a taxi, she would have to face one fact clearly and bravely and that fact would be that a love affair, just another love affair, was ended. Not a violent break or a quarrel or anything like that, just a gentle, painful decline, something to be glossed over and forgotten. By the time she had reached the top of Jimmy's street there were tears in her eyes.

She walked along the pavement on tiptoe. His windows were dark, she peered into them over the area railings. His curtains were not drawn, his room was empty. She walked over the road to where there was a street lamp and looked at her wrist watch. Ten past two. She stood there leaning against a railing, not far from the lamp, for several minutes. There were no lights in any of the houses except one on the corner. On the top floor, a little square of yellow blind with a shadow occasionally moving behind it. On her left, beyond the end of the road which was a cul-de-sac, were the trees of the gardens along the embankment; they rustled slightly in the damp breeze. Now and then she heard the noise of a train rumbling hollowly over Charing Cross bridge, and occasionally the mournful hoot of a tug on the river. Where on earth could he

be at this hour of the morning? He hated going out, or at least so he always said. He didn't drink much either. He wouldn't be sitting up with a lot of cronies just drinking. He was very responsible about his job too and in addition to a matinee tomorrow there was an understudy rehearsal at eleven—she knew that because she had happened to notice it on the board. He couldn't have gone home to his parents; they lived on the Isle of Wight. She sauntered slowly up to the corner of John Street and looked up and down it. No taxi in sight, nothing, only a cat stalking along by the railings. She stooped down and said "Puss, puss" to it but it ignored her and disappeared down some steps. Suddenly a taxi turned into the lower end of the street. Diana took to her heels and ran. Supposing it were Jimmy coming home with somebody—supposing he looked out and saw her standing on the pavement, watching him. Panic seized her. On the left, on the opposite side of the road from the house where he lived, was a dark archway. She dived into it and pressed herself against the wall. The taxi turned into the street and drew up. She peeped round the corner and saw a fat man and a woman in evening dress get out of it and let themselves into one of the houses. When the taxi had backed and driven away she emerged from the archway. "I'll walk," she said to herself out loud. "I'll walk up and down this street twenty times and if he hasn't come by then I'll—I'll walk up and down it another twenty times." She started walking and laughing at herself at the same time, quite genuine laughter; she listened to it and it didn't sound in the least hysterical. I'm feeling better, she thought, none of it matters nearly as much as I think it does, I've been making mountains out of mole-hills. I'm enjoying this really, it's an adventure. There's something strange and exciting in being out alone in the city at dead of night, I must do it more often. She laughed again at the picture of herself solemnly setting out two or three times a week on solitary nocturnal jaunts. After about the fifteenth time she had turned and retraced her steps, she met Jimmy face to face at the corner. He stopped in amazement and said, "My God—Diana—what on earth—"

She held out to him the parcel she'd been holding.

"I've brought you a present," she said with a little giggle. "It's Ess Viotto—for the hands!"

HER FIRST APPEARANCE



Richard Harding Davis

IT WAS at the end of the first act of the first night of *The Sultana*, and every member of the Lester Comic Opera Company, from Lester himself down to the wardrobe woman's son, who would have had to work if his mother lost her place, was sick with anxiety.

There is perhaps only one other place as feverish as it is behind the scenes on the first night of a comic opera, and that is a newspaper office on the last night of a Presidential campaign, when the returns are being flashed on the canvas outside, and the mob is howling, and the editor-in-chief is expecting to go to the Court of St. James if the election comes his way, and the office-boy is betting his wages that it won't.

Such nights as these try men's souls; but Van Bibber passed the stage-door man with as calmly polite a nod as though the piece had been running a hundred nights, and the manager was thinking up souvenirs for the one hundred and fiftieth, and the prima donna had, as usual, begun to hint for a new set of costumes. The stage-door keeper hesitated and was lost, and Van Bibber stepped into the unsuppressed excitement of the place with a pleased sniff at the familiar smell of paint and burning gas, and the dusty odor that came from the scene-lofts above.

For a moment he hesitated in the cross-lights and confusion about him, failing to recognize in their new costumes his old acquaintances of the company; but he saw Kripps, the stage-manager, in the center of the stage, perspiring and in his shirt-sleeves as always, wildly waving an arm to someone in the flies, and beckoning with the other to the gas-man in the front entrance. The stage hands were striking the scene for the first act, and fighting with the set for the second, and dragging out a canvas floor of tessellated marble,

and running a throne and a practical pair of steps over it, and aiming the high quaking walls of a palace and abuse at whoever came in their way.

"Now then, Van Bibber," shouted Kripps, with a wild glance of recognition, as the white-and-black figure came towards him, "you know you're the only man in New York who gets behind here tonight. But you can't stay. Lower it, lower it, can't you?" This to the man in the flies. "Any other night goes, but not this night. I can't have it. I— Where is the backing for the center entrance? Didn't I tell you men—"

Van Bibber dodged two stage hands who were steering a scene at him, stepped over the carpet as it unrolled, and brushed through a group of anxious, whispering chorus people into the quiet of the star's dressing room.

The star saw him in the long mirror before which he sat, while his dresser tugged at his boots, and threw up his hands desperately.

"Well," he cried, in mock resignation, "are we in it or are we not? Are they in their seats still or have they fled?"

"How are you, John?" said Van Bibber to the dresser. Then he dropped into a big armchair in the corner, and got up again with a protesting sigh to light his cigar between the wires around the gas-burner. "Oh, it's going very well. I wouldn't have come around if it wasn't. If the rest of it is as good as the first act, you needn't worry."

Van Bibber's unchallenged freedom behind the scenes had been a source of much comment and perplexity to the members of the Lester Comic Opera Company. He had made his first appearance there during one hot night of the long run of the previous summer, and had continued to be an almost nightly visitor for several weeks. At first it was supposed that he was backing the piece, that he was the "Angel," as those weak and wealthy individuals are called who allow themselves to be led into supplying the finances for theatrical experiments. But as he never peered through the curtain-hole to count the house, nor made frequent trips to the front of it to look at the box sheet, but was, on the contrary, just as undisturbed on a rainy night as on those when the "standing room only" sign blocked the front entrance, this supposition was discarded as untenable. Nor did he show the least interest in the prima donna, or in any of the other pretty women of the company; he did not know them, nor did he make any effort to know them, and it was not until

they inquired concerning him outside of the theatre that they learned what a figure in the social life of the city he really was. He spent most of his time in Lester's dressing room smoking, listening to the reminiscences of Lester's dresser when Lester was on the stage; and this seclusion and his clerical attire of evening dress led the second comedian to call him Lester's father confessor, and to suggest that he came to the theatre only to take the star to task for his sins. And in this the second comedian was unknowingly not so very far wrong. Lester, the comedian, and young Van Bibber had known each other at the university, when Lester's voice and gift of mimicry had made him the leader in the college theatricals; and later, when he had gone upon the stage, and had been cut off by his family even after he had become famous, or on account of it, Van Bibber had gone to visit him, and had found him as simple and sincere and boyish as he had been in the days of his Hasty-Pudding successes. And Lester, for his part, had found Van Bibber as likable as did every one else, and welcomed his quiet voice and youthful knowledge of the world as a grateful relief to the boisterous *camaraderie* of his professional acquaintances. And he allowed Van Bibber to scold him, and to remind him of what he owed to himself, and to touch, even whether it hurt or not, upon his better side. And in time he admitted to finding his friend's occasional comments on stage matters of value as coming from the point of view of those who look on at the game; and even Kripps, the veteran, regarded him with respect after he had told him that he could turn a set of purple costumes black by throwing a red light on them. To the company, after he came to know them, he was gravely polite, and, to those who knew him if they had overheard, amusingly commonplace in his conversation. He understood them better than they did themselves, and made no mistakes. The women smiled on him, but the men were suspicious and shy of him until they saw that he was quite as shy of the women; and then they made him a confidant, and told him all their woes and troubles, and exhibited all their little jealousies and ambitions, in the innocent hope that he would repeat what they said to Lester. They were simple, unconventional, lighthearted folk, and Van Bibber found them vastly more entertaining and preferable to the silence of the deserted club, where the matting was down, and from whence the regular *habitués* had departed to the other side or to Newport. He liked the swing of the light, bright music as it came to him through the open door of

the dressing room, and the glimpse he got of the chorus people crowding and pushing for a quick charge up the iron stairway, and the feverish smell of oxygen in the air, and the picturesque disorder of Lester's wardrobe, and the wigs and swords, and the mysterious articles of make-up, all mixed together on a tray with half-finished cigars and autograph books and newspaper "notices."

And he often wished he was clever enough to be an artist with the talent to paint the unconsciously graceful groups in the sharply divided light and shadow of the wings as he saw them. The brilliantly colored, fantastically clothed girls leaning against the bare brick wall of the theatre, or whispering together in circles, with their arms close about one another, or reading apart and solitary, or working at some piece of fancy-work as soberly as though they were in a rocking-chair in their own flat and not leaning against a scene brace, with the glare of the stage and the applause of the house just behind them. He liked to watch them coquetting with the big fireman detailed from the precinct engine-house, and clinging desperately to the curtain wire, or with one of the chorus men on the stairs, or teasing the phlegmatic scene-shifters as they tried to catch a minute's sleep on a pile of canvas. He even forgave the prima donna's smiling at him from the stage, as he stood watching her from the wings, and smiled back at her with polite cynicism, as though he did not know and she did not know that her smiles were not for him, but to disturb some more interested one in the front row. And so, in time, the company became so well accustomed to him that he moved in and about as unnoticed as the stage-manager himself, who prowled around hissing "hush" on principle, even though he was the only person who could fairly be said to be making a noise.

The second act was on, and Lester came off the stage and ran to the dressing room and beckoned violently. "Come here," he said; "you ought to see this: the children are doing their turn. You want to hear them. They're great!"

Van Bibber put his cigar into a tumbler and stepped out into the wings. They were crowded on both sides of the stage with the members of the company; the girls were tiptoeing, with their hands on the shoulders of the men, and making futile little leaps into the air to get a better view, and others were resting on one knee that those behind might see over their shoulders. There were over a dozen children before the footlights, with the prima donna in the

center. She was singing the verses of a song, and they were following her movements, and joining in the chorus with high piping voices. They seemed entirely too much at home and too self-conscious to please Van Bibber; but there was one exception. The one exception was the smallest of them, a very, very little girl, with long auburn hair and black eyes; such a very little girl that every one in the house looked at her first, and then looked at no one else. She was apparently as unconcerned to all about her, excepting the pretty prima donna, as though she were by a piano at home practicing a singing lesson. She seemed to think it was some new sort of a game. When the prima donna raised her arms, the child raised hers; when the prima donna courtesied, she stumbled into one, and straightened herself just in time to get the curls out of her eyes, and to see that the prima donna was laughing at her, and to smile cheerfully back, as if to say, "We are doing our best anyway, aren't we?" She had big, gentle eyes and two wonderful dimples, and in the excitement of the dancing and the singing her eyes laughed and flashed, and the dimples deepened and disappeared and reappeared again. She was as happy and innocent-looking as though it were nine in the morning and she were playing school at a kindergarten. From all over the house the women were murmuring their delight, and the men were laughing and pulling their mustaches and nudging each other to "look at the littlest one."

The girls in the wings were rapturous in their enthusiasm, and were calling her absurdly extravagant titles of endearment, and making so much noise that Kripps stopped grinning at her from the entrance, and looked back over his shoulder as he looked when he threatened fines and calls for early rehearsal. And when she had finished finally, and the prima donna and the children ran off together, there was a roar from the house that went to Lester's head like wine, and seemed to leap clear across the footlights and drag the children back again.

"That settles it!" cried Lester, in a suppressed roar of triumph. "I knew that child would catch them."

There were four encores, and then the children and Elise Broughten, the pretty prima donna, came off jubilant and happy, with the Littlest Girl's arms full of flowers, which the management had with kindly forethought prepared for the prima donna, but which that delightful young person and the delighted leader of the orchestra had passed over to the little girl.

"Well," gasped Miss Broughten, as she came up to Van Bibber laughing, and with one hand on her side and breathing very quickly, "will you kindly tell me who is the leading woman now? Am I the prima donna, or am I not? I wasn't in it, was I?"

"You were not," said Van Bibber.

He turned from the pretty prima donna and hunted up the wardrobe woman, and told her he wanted to meet the Littlest Girl. And the wardrobe woman, who was fluttering wildly about, and as delighted as though they were all her own children, told him to come into the property-room, where the children were, and which had been changed into a dressing room that they might be by themselves. The six little girls were in six different states of dishabille, but they were too little to mind that, and Van Bibber was too polite to observe it.

"This is the little girl, sir," said the wardrobe woman excitedly, proud at being the means of bringing together two such prominent people. "Her name is Madeline. Speak to the gentleman, Madeline; he wants to tell you what a great big hit youse made."

The little girl was seated on one of the cushions of a double throne so high from the ground that the young woman who was pulling off the child's silk stockings and putting woollen ones on in their place did so without stooping. The young woman looked at Van Bibber and nodded somewhat doubtfully and ungraciously, and Van Bibber turned to the little girl in preference. The young woman's face was one of a type that was too familiar to be pleasant.

He took the Littlest Girl's small hand in his and shook it solemnly, and said, "I am very glad to know you. Can I sit up here beside you, or do you rule alone?"

"Yes, ma'am—yes, sir," answered the little girl.

Van Bibber put his hands on the arms of the throne and vaulted up beside the girl, and pulled out the flower in his buttonhole and gave it to her.

"Now," prompted the wardrobe woman, "what do you say to the gentleman?"

"Thank you, sir," stammered the little girl.

"She is not much used to gentlemen's society," explained the woman who was pulling on the stockings.

"I see," said Van Bibber. He did not know exactly what to say next. And yet he wanted to talk to the child very much, so much more than he generally wanted to talk to most young women, who

showed no hesitation in talking to him. With them he had no difficulty whatsoever. There was a doll lying on the top of a chest near them, and he picked this up and surveyed it critically. "Is this your doll?" he asked.

"No," said Madeline, pointing to one of the children, who was much taller than herself; "it's 'at 'ittle durl's. My doll he's dead."

"Dear me!" said Van Bibber. He made a mental note to get a live one in the morning, and then he said: "That's very sad. But dead dolls do come to life."

The little girl looked up at him, and surveyed him intently and critically, and then smiled, with the dimples showing, as much as to say that she understood him and approved of him entirely. Van Bibber answered this sign language by taking Madeline's hand in his and asking her how she liked being a great actress, and how soon she would begin to storm because *that* photographer hadn't sent the proofs. The young woman understood this, and deigned to smile at it, but Madeline yawned a very polite and sleepy yawn, and closed her eyes. Van Bibber moved up closer, and she leaned over until her bare shoulder touched his arm, and while the woman buttoned on her absurdly small shoes, she let her curly head fall on his elbow and rest there. Any number of people had shown confidence in Van Bibber—not in that form exactly, but in the same spirit—and though he was used to being trusted, he felt a sharp thrill of pleasure at the touch of the child's head on his arm, and in the warm clasp of her fingers around his. And he was conscious of a keen sense of pity and sorrow for her rising in him, which he crushed by thinking that it was entirely wasted, and that the child was probably perfectly and ignorantly happy.

"Look at that, now," said the wardrobe woman, catching sight of the child's closed eyelids; "just look at the rest of the little dears, all that excited they can't stand still to get their hats on, and she just as unconcerned as you please, and after making the hit of the piece, too."

"She's not used to it, you see," said the young woman, knowingly; "she don't know what it means. It's just that much play to her."

This last was said with a questioning glance at Van Bibber, in whom she still feared to find the disguised agent of a Children's Aid Society. Van Bibber only nodded in reply, and did not answer her, because he found he could not very well, for he was looking a long way ahead at what the future was to bring to the con-

fiding little being at his side, and of the evil knowledge and temptations that would mar the beauty of her quaintly sweet face, and its strange mark of gentleness and refinement. Outside he could hear his friend Lester shouting the refrain of his new topical song, and the laughter and the hand-clapping came in through the wings and open door, broken but tumultuous.

"Does she come of professional people?" Van Bibber asked, dropping into the vernacular. He spoke softly, not so much that he might not disturb the child, but that she might not understand what he said.

"Yes," the woman answered shortly, and bent her head to smooth out the child's stage dress across her knees.

Van Bibber touched the little girl's head with his hand and found that she was asleep, and so let his hand rest there, with the curls between his fingers. "Are—are you her mother?", he asked, with a slight inclination of his head. He felt quite confident she was not; at least, he hoped not.

The woman shook her head. "No," she said.

"Who is her mother?"

The woman looked at the sleeping child and then up at him almost defiantly. "Ida Clare was her mother," she said.

Van Bibber's protecting hand left the child as suddenly as though something had burned it, and he drew back so quickly that her head slipped from his arm, and she awoke and raised her eyes and looked up at him questioningly. He looked back at her with a glance of the strangest concern and of the deepest pity. Then he stooped and drew her toward him very tenderly, put her head back in the corner of his arm, and watched her in silence while she smiled drowsily and went to sleep again.

"And who takes care of her now?" he asked.

The woman straightened herself and seemed relieved. She saw that the stranger had recognized the child's pedigree and knew her story, and that he was not going to comment on it. "I do," she said. "After the divorce Ida came to me," she said, speaking more freely. "I used to be in her company when she was doing *Aladdin*, and then when I left the stage and started to keep an actors' boarding-house, she came to me. She lived on with us a year, until she died, and she made me the guardian of the child. I train children for the stage, you know, me and my sister, Ada Dyer; you've heard of her, I guess. The courts pay us for her keep, but it isn't much, and

I'm expecting to get what I spent on her from what she makes on the stage. Two of them other children are my pupils; but they can't touch Madie. She is a better dancer an' singer than any of them. If it hadn't been for the Society keeping her back, she would have been on the stage two years ago. She's great, she is. She'll be just as good as her mother was."

Van Bibber gave a little start, and winced visibly, but turned it off into a cough. "And her father," he said, hesitatingly, "does he—"

"Her father," said the woman, tossing back her head, "he looks after himself, he does. We don't ask no favors of *him*. She'll get along without him or his folks, thank you. Call him a gentleman? Nice gentleman he is!" Then she stopped abruptly. "I guess, though, you know him," she added. "Perhaps he's a friend of yours?"

"I just know him," said Van Bibber, wearily.

He sat with the child asleep beside him while the woman turned to the others and dressed them for the third act. She explained that Madie would not appear in the last act, only the two larger girls, so she let her sleep, with the cape of Van Bibber's cloak around her.

Van Bibber sat there for several long minutes thinking, and then looked up quickly, and dropped his eyes again as quickly, and said, with an effort to speak quietly and unconcernedly: "If the little girl is not on in this act, would you mind if I took her home? I have a cab at the stage-door, and she's so sleepy it seems a pity to keep her up. The sister you spoke of or some one could put her to bed."

"Yes," the woman said, doubtfully, "Ada's home. Yes, you can take her around, if you want to."

She gave him the address, and he sprang down to the floor, and gathered the child up in his arms and stepped out on the stage. The prima donna had the center of it to herself at that moment, and all the rest of the company were waiting to go on; but when they saw the little girl in Van Bibber's arms they made a rush at her, and the girls leaned over and kissed her with a great show of rapture and with many gasps of delight.

"Don't," said Van Bibber, he could not tell just why. "Don't."

"Why not?" asked one of the girls, looking up at him sharply.

"She was asleep; you've wakened her," he said, gently.

But he knew that was not the reason. He stepped into the cab at the stage entrance, and put the child carefully down in one

corner. Then he looked over his shoulder to see that there was no one near enough to hear him, and said to the driver, "To the Berkeley Flats, on Fifth Avenue." He picked the child up gently in his arms as the carriage started, and sat looking out thoughtfully and anxiously as they flashed past the lighted shop-windows on Broadway. He was far from certain of this errand, and nervous with doubt, but he reassured himself that he was acting on impulse, and that his impulses were so often good. The hall-boy at the Berkeley said, yes, Mr. Caruthers was in, and Van Bibber gave a quick sigh of relief. He took this as an omen that his impulse was a good one. The young English servant who opened the hall door to Mr. Caruthers's apartment suppressed his surprise with an effort, and watched Van Bibber with alarm as he laid the child on the divan in the hall and pulled a covert coat from the rack to throw over her.

"Just say Mr. Van Bibber would like to see him," he said, "and you need not speak of the little girl having come with me."

She was still sleeping, and Van Bibber turned down the light in the hall, and stood looking down at her gravely while the servant went to speak to his master.

"Will you come this way, please, sir?" he said.

"You had better stay out here," said Van Bibber, "and come and tell me if she wakes."

Mr. Caruthers was standing by the mantel over the empty fireplace, wrapped in a long, loose dressing-gown which he was tying around him as Van Bibber entered. He was partly undressed, and had been just on the point of getting into bed. Mr. Caruthers was a tall, handsome man, with dark reddish hair, turning below the temples into gray; his mustache was quite white, and his eyes and face showed the signs of either dissipation or of great trouble, or of both. But even in the formless dressing-gown he had the look and the confident bearing of a gentleman, or, at least, of the man of the world. The room was very rich-looking, and was filled with the medley of a man's choice of good paintings and fine china, and papered with irregular rows of original drawings and signed etchings. The windows were open, and the lights were turned very low, so that Van Bibber could see the many gas lamps and the dark roofs of Broadway and the Avenue where they crossed a few blocks off, and the bunches of light on the Madison Square Garden, and the lights on the boats of the East River. From below in the

streets came the rattle of hurrying omnibuses and the rush of the hansom cabs. If Mr. Caruthers was surprised at this late visit, he hid it, and came forward to receive his caller as if his presence were expected.

"Excuse my costume, will you?" he said. "I turned in rather early tonight, it was so hot." He pointed to a decanter and some soda bottles on the table and a bowl of ice, and asked, "Will you have some of this?" And while he opened one of the bottles, he watched Van Bibber's face as though he were curious to have him explain the object of his visit.

"No, I think not, thank you," said the younger man. He touched his forehead with his handkerchief nervously. "Yes, it is hot," he said.

Mr. Caruthers filled a glass with ice and brandy and soda, and walked back to his place by the mantel, on which he rested his arm, while he clinked the ice in the glass and looked down into it.

"I was at the first night of *The Sultana* this evening," said Van Bibber, slowly and uncertainly.

"Oh, yes," assented the elder man politely, and tasting his drink. "Lester's new piece. Was it any good?"

"I don't know," said Van Bibber. "Yes, I think it was. I didn't see it from the front. There were a lot of children in it—little ones; they danced and sang, and made a great hit. One of them had never been on the stage before. It was her first appearance."

He was turning one of the glasses around between his fingers as he spoke. He stopped, and poured out some of the soda, and drank it down in a gulp, and then continued turning the empty glass between the tips of his fingers.

"It seems to me," he said, "that it is a great pity." He looked up interrogatively at the other man, but Mr. Caruthers met his glance without any returning show of interest. "I say," repeated Van Bibber—"I say it seems a pity that a child like that should be allowed to go on in that business. A grown woman can go into it with her eyes open, or a girl who has had decent training can too. But it's different with a child. She has no choice in the matter; they don't ask her permission; and she isn't old enough to know what it means; and she gets used to it and fond of it before she grows to know what the danger is. And then it's too late. It seemed to me that if there was anyone who had a right to stop it, it would be a very good thing to let that person know about her—about this

child, I mean; the one who made the hit—before it was too late. It seems to me a responsibility I wouldn't care to take myself. I wouldn't care to think that I had the chance to stop it, and had let the chance go by. You know what the life is, and what the temptation a woman—" Van Bibber stopped with a gasp of concern, and added, hurriedly, "I mean we all know—every man knows."

Mr. Caruthers was looking at him with his lips pressed closely together, and his eyebrows drawn into the shape of the letter V. He leaned forward, and looked at Van Bibber intently.

"What is all this about?" he asked. "Did you come here, Mr. Van Bibber, simply to tell me this? What have you to do with it? What have I to do with it? Why did you come?"

"Because of the child."

"What child?"

"Your child," said Van Bibber.

Young Van Bibber was quite prepared for an outbreak of some sort, and mentally braced himself to receive it. He rapidly assured himself that this man had every reason to be angry, and that he, if he meant to accomplish anything, had every reason to be considerate and patient. So he faced Mr. Caruthers with shoulders squared, as though it were a physical shock he had to stand against, and in consequence he was quite unprepared for what followed. For Mr. Caruthers raised his face without a trace of feeling in it, and, with his eyes still fixed on the glass in his hand, set it carefully down on the mantel beside him, and girded himself about with the rope of his robe. When he spoke, it was in a tone of quiet politeness.

"Mr. Van Bibber," he began, "you are a very brave young man. You have dared to say to me what those who are my best friends—what even my own family would not care to say. They are afraid it might hurt me, I suppose. They have some absurd regard for my feelings; they hesitate to touch upon a subject which in no way concerns them, and which they know must be very painful to me. But you have the courage of your convictions; you have no compunctions about tearing open old wounds; and you come here, unasked and uninvited, to let me know what you think of my conduct, to let me understand that it does not agree with your own ideas of what I ought to do, and to tell me how I, who am old enough to be your father, should behave. You have rushed in where angels fear to tread, Mr. Van Bibber, to show me the error of my ways. I suppose I ought to thank you for it; but I have always said

that it is not the wicked people who are to be feared in this world, or who do the most harm. We know them; we can prepare for them, and checkmate them. It is the well-meaning fool who makes all the trouble. For no one knows him until he discloses himself, and the mischief is done before he can be stopped. I think, if you will allow me to say so, that you have demonstrated my theory pretty thoroughly, and have done about as much needless harm for one evening as you can possibly wish. And so, if you will excuse me," he continued sternly, and moving from his place, "I will ask to say good night, and will request of you that you grow older and wiser and much more considerate before you come to see me again."

Van Bibber had flushed at Mr. Caruther's first words, and had then grown somewhat pale, and straightened himself visibly. He did not move when the elder man had finished, but cleared his throat, and then spoke with some little difficulty. "It is very easy to call a man a fool," he said, slowly, "but it is much harder to be called a fool and not to throw the other man out of the window. But that, you see, would not do any good, and I have something to say to you first. I am quite clear in my own mind as to my position, and I am not going to allow anything you have said or can say to annoy me much until I am through. There will be time enough to resent it then. I am quite well aware that I did an unconventional thing in coming here—a bold thing or a foolish thing, as you choose—but the situation is pretty bad, and I did as I would have wished to be done by if I had had a child going to the devil and didn't know it. I should have been glad to learn of it even from a stranger. However," he said, smiling grimly and pulling his cape about him, "there are other kindly disposed people in the world besides fathers. There is an aunt, perhaps, or an uncle or two; and sometimes, even today, there is the chance Samaritan."

Van Bibber picked up his high hat from the table, looked into it critically, and settled it on his head. "Good night," he said, and walked slowly toward the door. He had his hand on the knob, when Mr. Caruthers raised his head.

"Wait just one minute, please, Mr. Van Bibber?" asked Mr. Caruthers.

Van Bibber stopped with a prompt obedience which would have led one to conclude that he might have put on his hat only to precipitate matters.

"Before you go," said Mr. Caruthers, grudgingly, "I want to say—I want you to understand my position."

"Oh, that's all right," said Van Bibber lightly, opening the door.

"No, it is not all right. One moment, please. I do not intend that you shall go away from here with the idea that you have tried to do me a service, and that I have been unable to appreciate it, and that you are a much-abused and much-misunderstood young man. Since you have done me the honor to make my affairs your business, I would prefer that you should understand them fully. I do not care to have you discuss my conduct at clubs and afternoon teas with young women until you—"

Van Bibber drew in his breath sharply, with a peculiar whistling sound, and opened and shut his hands. "Oh, I wouldn't say that if I were you," he said, simply.

"I beg your pardon," the older man said quickly. "That was a mistake. I was wrong. I beg your pardon. But you have tried me very sorely. You have intruded upon a private trouble that you ought to know must be very painful to me. But I believe you meant well. I know you to be a gentleman, and I am willing to think you acted on impulse, and that you will see tomorrow what a mistake you have made. It is not a thing I talk about; I do not speak of it to my friends, and they are far too considerate to speak of it to me. But you have put me on the defensive. You have made me out more or less of a brute, and I don't intend to be so far misunderstood. There are two sides to every story, and there is something to be said about this, even for me."

He walked back to his place beside the mantel and put his shoulders against it, and faced Van Bibber, with his fingers twisted in the cord around his waist.

"When I married," said Mr. Caruthers, "I did so against the wishes of my people and the advice of all my friends. You know all about that. God help us! who doesn't?" he added bitterly. "It was very rich, rare reading for you and for everyone else who saw the daily papers, and we gave them all they wanted of it. I took her out of that life and married her because I believed she was as good a woman as any of those who had never had to work for their living, and I was bound that my friends and your friends should recognize her and respect her as my wife had a right to be respected; and I took her abroad that I might give all you sensitive, fine people a chance to get used to the idea of being polite to a

woman who had once been a burlesque actress. It began over there in Paris. What I went through then no one knows; but when I came back—and I would never have come back if she had not made me—it was my friends I had to consider, and not her. It was in the blood; it was in the life she had led, and in the life men like you and me had taught her to live. And it had to come out."

The muscles of Mr. Caruthers's face were moving, and beyond his control; but Van Bibber did not see this, for he was looking intently out of the window, over the roofs of the city.

"She had every chance when she married me that a woman ever had," continued the older man. "It only depended on herself. I didn't try to make a housewife of her or a drudge. She had all the healthy excitement and all the money she wanted, and she had a home here ready for her whenever she was tired of traveling about and wished to settle down. And I was—and a husband that loved her as—she had everything. Everything that a man's whole thought and love and money could bring to her. And you know what she did."

He looked at Van Bibber, but Van Bibber's eyes were still turned toward the open window and the night.

"And after the divorce—and she was free to go where she pleased, and to live as she pleased and with whom she pleased, without bringing disgrace on a husband who honestly loved her—I swore to my God that I would never see her nor her child again. And I never saw her again, not even when she died. I loved the mother, and she deceived me and disgraced me and broke my heart, and I only wish she had killed me; and I was beginning to love her child, and I vowed she should not live to trick me too. I had suffered as no man I know had suffered; in a way a boy like you cannot understand, and that no one can understand who has not gone to hell and been forced to live after it. And was I to go through that again? Was I to love and care for and worship this child, and have her grow up with all her mother's vanity and animal nature, and have her turn on me some day and show me that what is bred in the bone must tell, and that I was a fool again—a pitiful fond fool? I could not trust her. I can never trust any woman or child again, and least of all that woman's child. She is as dead to me as though she were buried with her mother, and it is nothing to me what she is or what her life is. I know in time what it will be. She has begun earlier than I had supposed, that is all;

but she is nothing to me." The man stopped and turned his back to Van Bibber, and hid his head in his hands, with his elbows on the mantelpiece. "I care too much," he said. "I cannot let it mean anything to me; when I do care, it means so much more to me than to other men. They may pretend to laugh and to forget and to outgrow it, but it is not so with me. It means too much." He took a quick stride toward one of the armchairs and threw himself into it. "Why, man," he cried, "I loved that child's mother to the day of her death. I loved that woman then, and, God help me! I love that woman still."

He covered his face with his hands, and sat leaning forward and breathing heavily as he rocked himself to and fro. Van Bibber still stood looking gravely out at the lights that picketed the black surface of the city. He was to all appearances as unmoved by the outburst of feeling into which the older man had been surprised as though it had been something in a play. There was an unbroken silence for a moment, and then it was Van Bibber who was the first to speak.

"I came here, as you say, on impulse," he said; "but I am glad I came, for I have your decisive answer now about the little girl. I have been thinking," he continued, slowly, "since you have been speaking, and before, when I first saw her dancing in front of the footlights, when I did not know who she was, that I could give up a horse or two, if necessary, and support this child instead. Children are worth more than horses, and a man who saves a soul, as it says"—he flushed slightly, and looked up with a hesitating, deprecatory smile—"somewhere, wipes out a multitude of sins. And it may be I'd like to try and get rid of some of mine. I know just where to send her; I know the very place. It's down in Evergreen Bay, on Long Island. They are tenants of mine there, and very nice farm sort of people who will be very good to her. They wouldn't know anything about her, and she'd forget what little she knows of this present life very soon, and grow up with the other children to be one of them; and then, when she gets older and becomes a young lady, she could go to some school—but that's a bit too far ahead to plan for the present; but that's what I am going to do, though," said the young man confidently, and as though speaking to himself. "That theatrical boardinghouse person could be bought off easily enough," he went on quickly, "and Lester won't mind letting her go if I ask it, and—and that's what

I'll do. As you say, it's a good deal of an experiment, but I think I'll run the risk."

He walked quickly to the door and disappeared in the hall, and then came back, kicking the door open as he returned and holding the child in his arms.

"This is she," he said quietly. He did not look at or notice the father, but stood, with the child asleep in the bend of his left arm, gazing down at her. "This is she," he repeated; "this is your child."

There was something cold and satisfied in Van Bibber's tone and manner, as though he were congratulating himself upon the engaging of a new groom; something that placed the father entirely outside of it. He might have been a disinterested looker-on.

"She will need to be fed a bit," Van Bibber ran on, cheerfully. "They did not treat her very well, I fancy. She is thin and peaked and tired-looking." He drew up the loose sleeve of her jacket, and showed the bare forearm to the light. He put his thumb and little finger about it, and closed them on it gently. "It is very thin," he said. "And under her eyes, if it were not for the paint," he went on, mercilessly, "you could see how deep the lines are. This red spot on her cheek," he said gravely, "is where Mary Vane kissed her tonight, and this is where Alma Stanley kissed her, and that Lee girl. You have heard of them, perhaps. They will never kiss her again. She is going to grow up a sweet, fine, beautiful woman—are you not?" he said, gently drawing the child higher up on his shoulder, until her face touched his, and still keeping his eyes from the face of the older man. "She does not look like her mother," he said; "she has her father's auburn hair and straight nose and finer-cut lips and chin. She looks very much like her father. It seems a pity," he added, abruptly. "She will grow up," he went on, "without knowing him, or who he is—or was, if he should die. She will never speak with him, or see him, or take his hand. She may pass him some day on the street and will not know him, and he will not know her, but she will grow to be very fond and to be very grateful to the simple, kindhearted old people who will have cared for her when she was a little girl."

The child in his arms stirred, shivered slightly, and awoke. The two men watched her breathlessly, with silent intentness. She raised her head and stared around the unfamiliar room doubtfully, then turned to where her father stood, looking at him a moment, and passed him by; and then, looking up into Van Bibber's face,

recognized him and gave a gentle, sleepy smile, and, with a sigh of content and confidence, drew her arm up closer around his neck and let her head fall back upon his breast.

The father sprang to his feet with a quick, jealous gasp of pain. "Give her to me!" he said, fiercely, under his breath, snatching her out of Van Bibber's arms. "She is mine; give her to me!"

Van Bibber closed the door gently behind him and went jumping down the winding stairs of the Berkeley three steps at a time.

And an hour later, when the English servant came to his master's door, he found him still awake and sitting in the dark by the open window, holding something in his arms and looking out over the sleeping city.

"James," he said, "you can make up a place for me here on the lounge. Miss Caruthers, my daughter, will sleep in my room tonight."

CRAZY SUNDAY



F. Scott Fitzgerald

IT WAS SUNDAY—not a day, but rather a gap between two other days. Behind, for all of them, lay sets and sequences, the struggles of rival ingenuities in the conference rooms, the interminable waits under the crane that swung the microphone, the hundred miles a day by automobiles to and fro across Hollywood county, the ceaseless compromise, the clash and strain of many personalities fighting for their lives. And now Sunday, with individual life starting up again, with a glow kindling in eyes that had been glazed with monotony the afternoon before. Slowly as the hours waned they came awake like *Puppenseen* in a toy shop: an intense colloquy in a corner, lovers disappearing to kiss in a hall. And the feeling of "Hurry, it's not too late, but for God's sake hurry before the blessed forty hours of leisure are over."

Joel Coles was writing continuity. He was twenty-eight and not yet broken by Hollywood. He had had what were considered nice assignments since his arrival six months before and he submitted his scenes and sequences with enthusiasm. He referred to himself modestly as a hack but really did not think of it that way. His mother had been a successful actress; Joel had spent his childhood between London and New York trying to separate the real from the unreal, or at least to keep one guess ahead. He was a handsome man with the pleasant cow-brown eyes that in 1913 had gazed out at Broadway audiences from his mother's face.

When the invitation came it made him sure that he was getting somewhere. Ordinarily he did not go out on Sundays but stayed sober and took work home with him. Recently they had given him a Eugene O'Neill play destined for a very important lady indeed. Everything he had done so far had pleased Miles Calman, and Miles Calman was the only director on the lot who refused to work under a supervisor and was responsible to the money men alone. Everything was clicking into place in Joel's career. ("This is Mr. Calman's secretary. Will you come to tea from four to six Sunday—he lives in Beverly Hills, number—")

Joel was flattered. It would be a party out of the top-drawer. It was a tribute to himself as a young man of promise. The Marion Davies crowd, the high-hats, the big currency numbers, perhaps even Dietrich and Garbo and the Marquise, people who were not seen everywhere, would probably be at Calman's.

"I won't take anything to drink," he assured himself. Calman was audibly tired of rummies, and thought it a pity the industry could not get along without them.

Joel agreed that writers drank too much—he did himself, but he wouldn't this afternoon. He wished Miles would be within hearing when the cocktails were passed to hear his succinct, unobtrusive, No, thank you.

Miles Calman's house was built for great emotional moments—there was an air of listening, as if the far silences of its vistas hid an audience, but this afternoon it was thronged, as though people had been bidden rather than asked. Joel noted with pride that only two other writers from the studio were in the crowd, an ennobled limey and, somewhat to his surprise, Nat Keogh, who had evoked Calman's impatient comment on drunks.

Stella Calman (Stella Walker, of course) did not move on to

her other guests after she spoke to Joel. She lingered—she looked at him with the sort of beautiful look that demands some sort of acknowledgment and Joel drew quickly on the dramatic adequacy inherited from his mother:

"Well, you look about sixteen! Where's your kiddie car?"

She was visibly pleased; she lingered. He felt that he should say something more, something confident and easy—he had first met her when she was struggling for bits in New York. At the moment a tray slid up and Stella put a cocktail glass into his hand.

"Everybody's afraid, aren't they?" he said, looking at it absently. "Everybody watches for everybody else's blunders, or tries to make sure they're with people that'll do them credit. Of course that's not true in your house," he covered himself hastily. "I just meant generally in Hollywood."

Stella agreed. She presented several people to Joel as if he were very important. Reassuring himself that Miles was at the other side of the room, Joel drank the cocktail.

"So you have a baby?" he said. "That's the time to look out. After a pretty woman has had her first child, she's very vulnerable, because she wants to be reassured about her own charm. She's got to have some new man's unqualified devotion to prove to herself she hasn't lost anything."

"I never get anybody's unqualified devotion," Stella said rather resentfully.

"They're afraid of your husband."

"You think that's it?" She wrinkled her brow over the idea; then the conversation was interrupted at the exact moment Joel would have chosen.

Her attentions had given him confidence. Not for him to join safe groups, to slink to refuge under the wings of such acquaintances as he saw about the room. He walked to the window and looked out toward the Pacific, colorless under its sluggish sunset. It was good here—the American Riviera and all that, if there were ever time to enjoy it. The handsome, well-dressed people in the room, the lovely girls, and the—well, the lovely girls. You couldn't have everything.

He saw Stella's fresh boyish face, with the tired eyelid that always drooped a little over one eye, moving about among her guests and he wanted to sit with her and talk a long time as if she were a girl instead of a name; he followed her to see if she

paid anyone as much attention as she had paid him. He took another cocktail—not because he needed confidence but because she had given him so much of it. Then he sat down beside the director's mother.

"Your son's gotten to be a legend, Mrs. Calman—Oracle and a Man of Destiny and all that. Personally, I'm against him but I'm in a minority. What do you think of him? Are you impressed? Are you surprised how far he's gone?"

"No, I'm not surprised," she said calmly. "We always expected a lot from Miles."

"Well now, that's unusual," remarked Joel. "I always think all mothers are like Napoleon's mother. My mother didn't want me to have anything to do with the entertainment business. She wanted me to go to West Point and be safe."

"We always had every confidence in Miles." . . .

He stood by the built-in bar of the dining room with the good-humored, heavy-drinking, highly paid Nat Keogh.

"—I made a hundred grand during the year and lost forty grand gambling, so now I've hired a manager."

"You mean an agent," suggested Joel.

"No, I've got that too. I mean a manager. I make over everything to my wife and then he and my wife get together and hand me out the money. I pay him five thousand a year for this."

"You mean your agent."

"No, I mean my manager, and I'm not the only one—a lot of other irresponsible people have him."

"Well, if you're irresponsible why are you responsible enough to hire a manager?"

"I'm just irresponsible about gambling. Look here—"

A singer performed; Joel and Nat went forward with the others to listen.

2

The singing reached Joel vaguely; he felt happy and friendly toward all the people gathered there, people of bravery and industry, superior to a *bourgeoisie* that outdid them in ignorance and loose living, risen to a position of the highest prominence in a nation that for a decade had wanted only to be entertained. He liked them—he loved them. Great waves of good feeling flowed through him.

As the singer finished his number and there was a drift toward the hostess to say good-by, Joel had an idea. He would give them "Building It Up," his own composition. It was his only parlor trick, it had amused several parties and it might please Stella Walker. Possessed by the hunch, his blood throbbing with the scarlet corpuscles of exhibitionism, he sought her.

"Of course," she cried. "Please! Do you need anything?"

"Someone has to be the secretary that I'm supposed to be dictating to."

"I'll be her."

As the word spread the guests in the hall, already putting on their coats to leave, drifted back and Joel faced the eyes of many strangers. He had a dim foreboding, realizing that the man who had just performed was a famous radio entertainer. Then someone said "Sh!" and he was alone with Stella, the center of a sinister Indian-like half-circle. Stella smiled up at him expectantly—he began.

His burlesque was based upon the cultural limitations of Mr. Dave Silverstein, an independent producer; Silverstein was presumed to be dictating a letter outlining a treatment of a story he had bought.

"—a story of divorce, the younger generators and the Foreign Legion," he heard his voice saying, with the intonations of Mr. Silverstein. "But we got to build it up, see?"

A sharp pang of doubt struck through him. The faces surrounding him in the gently molded light were intent and curious, but there was no ghost of a smile anywhere; directly in front the Great Lover of the screen glared at him with an eye as keen as the eye of a potato. Only Stella Walker looked up at him with a radiant, never faltering smile.

"If we make him a Menjoy type, then we get a sort of Michael Arlen only with a Honolulu atmosphere."

Still not a ripple in front, but in the rear a rustling, a perceptible shift toward the left, toward the front door.

"—then she says she feels this sex appil for him and he burns out and says 'Oh go on destroy yourself'"—

At some point he heard Nat Keogh snicker and here and there were a few encouraging faces, but as he finished he had the sickening realization that he had made a fool of himself in view of

an important section of the picture world, upon whose favor depended his career.

For a moment he existed in the midst of a confused silence, broken by a general trek for the door. He felt the undercurrent of derision that rolled through the gossip; then—all this was in the space of ten seconds—the Great Lover, his eye hard and empty as the eye of a needle, shouted "Boo! Boo!" voicing in an overtone what he felt was the mood of the crowd. It was the resentment of the professional toward the amateur, of the community toward the stranger, the thumbs-down of the clan.

Only Stella Walker was still standing near and thanking him as if he had been an unparalleled success, as if it hadn't occurred to her that anyone hadn't liked it. As Nat Keogh helped him into his overcoat, a great wave of self-disgust swept over him and he swung desperately to his rule of never betraying an inferior emotion until he no longer felt it.

"I was a flop," he said lightly, to Stella. "Never mind, it's a good number when appreciated. Thanks for your co-operation."

The smile did not leave her face—he bowed rather drunkenly and Nat drew him toward the door. . . .

The arrival of his breakfast awakened him into a broken and ruined world. Yesterday he was himself, a point of fire against an industry, today he felt that he was pitted under an enormous disadvantage, against those faces, against individual contempt and collective sneer. Worse than that, to Miles Calman he was becoming one of those rummies, stripped of dignity, whom Calman regretted he was compelled to use. To Stella Walker, on whom he had forced a martyrdom to preserve the courtesy of her house—her opinion he did not dare to guess. His gastric juices ceased to flow and he set his poached eggs back on the telephone table. He wrote:

DEAR MILES—

You can imagine my profound self-disgust. I confess to a taint of exhibitionism, but at six o'clock in the afternoon, in broad daylight! Good God! My apologies to your wife.

Yours ever,

JOEL COLES.

Joel emerged from his office on the lot only to slink like a malefactor to the tobacco store. So suspicious was his manner that one of the studio police asked to see his admission card. He had decided to eat lunch outside when Nat Keogh, confident and cheerful, overtook him.

"What do you mean you're in permanent retirement? What if that Three Piece Suit did boo you?"

"Why listen," he continued, drawing Joel into the studio restaurant. "The night of one of his premières at Grauman's, Joe Squires kicked his tail while he was bowing to the crowd. The ham said Joe'd hear from him later but when Joe called him up at eight o'clock next day and said, 'I thought I was going to hear from you,' he hung up the phone."

The preposterous story cheered Joe, and he found a gloomy consolation in staring at the group at the next table, the sad, lovely Siamese twins, the mean dwarfs, the proud giant from the circus picture. But looking beyond at the yellow-stained faces of pretty women, their eyes all melancholy and startling with mascara, their ball gowns garish in full day, he saw a group who had been at Calman's and winced.

"Never again," he exclaimed aloud, "absolutely my last social appearance in Hollywood!"

The following morning a telegram was waiting for him at his office:

YOU WERE ONE OF THE MOST AGREEABLE PEOPLE AT OUR PARTY.
EXPECT YOU AT MY SISTER JUNE'S BUFFET SUPPER NEXT
SUNDAY.

STELLA WALKER CALMAN.

The blood rushed fast through his veins for a feverish minute. Incredulously he read the telegram over.

"Well, that's the sweetest thing I ever heard of in my life!"

3

Crazy Sunday again. Joel slept until eleven, then he read a newspaper to catch up with the past week. He lunched in his room on trout, avocado salad and a pint of California wine. Dressing for the tea, he selected a pin-check suit, a blue shirt, a burnt-orange tie. There were dark circles of fatigue under his eyes. In

his secondhand car he drove to the Riviera apartments. As he was introducing himself to Stella's sister, Miles and Stella arrived in riding clothes—they had been quarreling fiercely most of the afternoon on all the dirt roads back of Beverly Hills.

Miles Calman, tall, nervous, with a desperate humor and the unhappiest eyes Joel ever saw, was an artist from the top of his curiously shaped head to his niggerish feet. Upon these last he stood very firmly—he had never made a cheap picture though he had sometimes paid heavily for the luxury of making experimental flops. In spite of his excellent company, one could not be with him long without realizing that he was not a well man.

From the moment of their entrance Joel's day bound itself up inextricably with theirs. As he joined the group around them Stella turned away from it with an impatient little tongue click—and Miles Calman said to the man who happened to be next to him:

"Go easy on Eva Goebel. There's hell to pay about her at home." Miles turned to Joel. "I'm sorry I missed you at the office yesterday. I spent the afternoon at the analyst's."

"You being psychoanalyzed?"

"I have been for months. First I went for claustrophobia, now I'm trying to get my whole life cleared up. They say it'll take over a year."

"There's nothing the matter with your life," Joel assured him.

"Oh, no? Well, Stella seems to think so. Ask anybody—they can all tell you about it," he said bitterly.

A girl perched herself on the arm of Miles' chair; Joel crossed to Stella, who stood disconsolately by the fire.

"Thank you for your telegram," he said. "It was darn sweet. I can't imagine anybody as good-looking as you are being so good-humored."

She was a little lovelier than he had ever seen her and perhaps the unstinted admiration in his eyes prompted her to unload on him—it did not take long, for she was obviously at the emotional bursting point.

"—and Miles has been carrying on this thing for *two years*, and I never knew. Why, she was one of my best friends, always in the house. Finally when people began to come to me, Miles had to admit it."

She sat down vehemently on the arm of Joel's chair. Her riding

breeches were the color of the chair and Joel saw that the mass of her hair was made up of some strands of red gold and some of pale gold, so that it could not be dyed, and that she had on no make-up. She was that good-looking—

Still quivering with the shock of her discovery, Stella found unbearable the spectacle of a new girl hovering over Miles; she led Joel into a bedroom, and seated at either end of a big bed they went on talking. People on their way to the washroom glanced in and made wisecracks, but Stella, emptying out her story, paid no attention. After a while Miles stuck his head in the door and said, "There's no use trying to explain something to Joel in half an hour that I don't understand myself and the psychoanalyst says will take a whole year to understand."

She talked on as if Miles were not there. She loved Miles, she said—under considerable difficulties she had always been faithful to him.

"The psychoanalyst told Miles that he had a mother complex. In his first marriage he transferred his mother complex to his wife, you see—and then his sex turned to me. But when we married the thing repeated itself—he transferred his mother complex to me and all his libido turned toward this other woman."

Joel knew that this probably wasn't gibberish—yet it sounded like gibberish. He knew Eva Goebel; she was a motherly person, older and probably wiser than Stella, who was a golden child.

Miles now suggested impatiently that Joel come back with them since Stella had so much to say, so they drove out to the mansion in Beverly Hills. Under the high ceilings the situation seemed more dignified and tragic. It was an eerie bright night with the dark very clear outside of all the windows and Stella all rose-gold raging and crying around the room. Joel did not quite believe in picture actresses' grief. They have other preoccupations—they are beautiful rose-gold figures blown full of life by writers and directors, and after hours they sit around and talk in whispers and giggled innuendoes, and the ends of many adventures flow through them.

Sometimes he pretended to listen and instead thought how well she was got up—sleek breeches with a matched set of legs in them, an Italian-colored sweater with a little high neck, and a short brown chamois coat. He couldn't decide whether she was an imitation of an English lady or an English lady was an imitation of

her. She hovered somewhere between the realest of realities and the most blatant of impersonations.

"Miles is so jealous of me that he questions everything I do," she cried scornfully. "When I was in New York I wrote him that I'd been to the theatre with Eddie Baker. Miles was so jealous he phoned me ten times in one day."

"I was wild," Miles snuffled sharply, a habit he had in times of stress. "The analyst couldn't get any results for a week."

Stella shook her head despairingly. "Did you expect me just to sit in the hotel for three weeks?"

"I don't expect anything. I admit that I'm jealous. I try not to be. I worked on that with Dr. Bridgebane, but it didn't do any good. I was jealous of Joel this afternoon when you sat on the arm of his chair."

"You were?" She started up. "You *were!* Wasn't there somebody on the arm of your chair? And did you speak to me for two hours?"

"You were telling your troubles to Joel in the bedroom."

"When I think that that woman"—she seemed to believe that to omit Eva Goebel's name would be to lessen her reality—"used to come here—"

"All right—all right," said Miles wearily. "I've admitted everything and I feel as bad about it as you do." Turning to Joel he began talking about pictures, while Stella moved restlessly along the far walls, her hands in her breeches pockets.

"They've treated Miles terribly," she said, coming suddenly back into the conversation as if they'd never discussed her personal affairs. "Dear, tell him about old Beltzer trying to change your picture."

As she stood hovering protectively over Miles, her eyes flashing with indignation in his behalf, Joel realized that he was in love with her. Stifled with excitement he got up to say good night.

With Monday the week resumed its workaday rhythm, in sharp contrast to the theoretical discussions, the gossip and scandal of Sunday; there was the endless detail of script revision—"Instead of a lousy dissolve, we can leave her voice on the sound track and cut to a medium shot of the taxi from Bell's angle or we can simply pull the camera back to include the station, hold it a minute and then pan to the row of taxis"—by Monday afternoon Joel had again forgotten that people whose business was to provide entertainment were ever privileged to be entertained. In the eve-

ning he phoned Miles' house. He asked for Miles but Stella came to the phone.

"Do things seem better?"

"Not particularly. What are you doing next Saturday evening?"

"Nothing."

"The Perrys are giving a dinner and theatre party and Miles won't be here—he's flying to South Bend to see the Notre Dame-California game, I thought you might go with me in his place."

After a long moment Joel said, "Why—surely. If there's a conference I can't make dinner but I can get to the theatre."

"Then I'll say we can come."

Joel walked to his office. In view of the strained relations of the Calmans, would Miles be pleased, or did she intend that Miles shouldn't know of it? That would be out of the question—if Miles didn't mention it Joel would. But it was an hour or more before he could get down to work again.

Wednesday there was a four-hour wrangle in a conference room crowded with planets and nebulae of cigarette smoke. Three men and a woman paced the carpet in turn, suggesting or condemning, speaking sharply or persuasively, confidently or despairingly. At the end Joel lingered to have a talk with Miles.

The man was tired—not with the exaltation of fatigue but life-tired, with his lids sagging and his beard prominent over the blue shadows near his mouth.

"I hear you're flying to the Notre Dame game."

Miles looked beyond him and shook his head.

"I've given up the idea."

"Why?"

"On account of you." Still he did not look at Joel.

"What the hell, Miles?"

"That's why I've given it up." He broke into a perfunctory laugh at himself. "I can't tell what Stella might do just out of spite—she's invited you to take her to the Perrys', hasn't she? I wouldn't enjoy the game."

The fine instinct that moved swiftly and confidently on the set, muddled so weakly and helplessly through his personal life.

"Look, Miles," Joel said frowning. "I've never made any passes *whatsoever* at Stella. If you're really seriously canceling your trip on account of me, I won't go to the Perrys' with her. I won't see her. You can trust me absolutely."

Miles looked at him, carefully now.

"Maybe." He shrugged his shoulders. "Anyhow there'd just be somebody else. I wouldn't have any fun."

"You don't seem to have much confidence in Stella. She told me she'd always been true to you."

"Maybe she has." In the last few minutes several more muscles had sagged around Miles' mouth. "But how can I ask anything of her after what's happened? How can I expect her—" He broke off and his face grew harder as he said, "I'll tell you one thing, right or wrong and no matter what I've done, if I ever had anything on her I'd divorce her. I can't have my pride hurt—that would be the last straw."

His tone annoyed Joel, but he said, "Hasn't she calmed down about the Eva Goebel thing?"

"No." Miles snuffled pessimistically. "I can't get over it either."

"I thought it was finished."

"I'm trying not to see Eva again, but you know it isn't easy just to drop something like that—it isn't some girl I kissed last night in a taxi! The psychoanalyst says—"

"I know," Joel interrupted. "Stella told me." This was depressing. "Well, as far as I'm concerned if you go to the game I won't see Stella. And I'm sure Stella has nothing on her conscience about anybody."

"Maybe not," Miles repeated listlessly. "Anyhow I'll stay and take her to the party. Say," he said suddenly, "I wish you'd come too. I've got to have somebody sympathetic to talk to. That's the trouble—I've influenced Stella in everything. Especially I've influenced her so that she likes all the men I like—it's very difficult."

"It must be," Joel agreed.

4

Joel could not get to the dinner. Self-conscious in his silk hat against the unemployment, he waited for the others in front of the Hollywood Theatre and watched the evening parade: obscure replicas of bright, particular picture stars, spavined men in polo coats, a stomping dervish with the beard and staff of an apostle, a pair of chic Filipinos in collegiate clothes, reminder that this corner of the Republic opened to the seven seas, a long fantastic carnival of young shouts which proved to be a fraternity initiation. The line split to pass two smart limousines that stopped at the curb.

There she was, in a dress like ice water, made in a thousand pale blue pieces, with icicles trickling at the throat. He started forward.

"So you like my dress?"

"Where's Miles?"

"He flew to the game after all. He left yesterday morning—at least I think—" She broke off. "I just got a telegram from South Bend saying that he's starting back. I forgot—you know all these people?"

The party of eight moved into the theatre.

Miles had gone after all and Joel wondered if he should have come. But during the performance, with Stella a profile under the pure grain of light hair, he thought no more about Miles. Once he turned and looked at her and she looked back at him, smiling and meeting his eyes for as long as he wanted. Between the acts they smoked in the lobby and she whispered:

"They're all going to the opening of Jack Johnson's night club—I don't want to go, do you?"

"Do we have to?"

"I suppose not." She hesitated. "I'd like to talk to you. I suppose we could go to our house—if I were only sure—"

Again she hesitated and Joel asked:

"Sure of what?"

"Sure that—oh, I'm haywire I know, but how can I be sure Miles went to the game?"

"You mean you think he's with Eva Goebel?"

"No, not so much that—but supposing he was here watching everything I do. You know Miles does odd things sometimes. Once he wanted a man with a long beard to drink tea with him and he sent down to the casting agency for one, and drank tea with him all afternoon."

"That's different. He sent you a wire from South Bend—that proves he's at the game."

After the play they said good night to the others at the curb and were answered by looks of amusement. They slid off along the golden garish thoroughfare through the crowd that had gathered around Stella.

"You see he could arrange the telegrams," Stella said, "very easily."

That was true. And with the idea that perhaps her uneasiness

was justified, Joel grew angry: if Miles had trained a camera on them he felt no obligations toward Miles. Aloud he said:

"That's nonsense."

There were Christmas trees already in the shop windows and the full moon over the boulevard was only a prop, as scenic as the giant boudoir lamps of the corners. On into the dark foliage of Beverly Hills that flamed as eucalyptus by day, Joel saw only the flash of a white face under his own, the arc of her shoulder. She pulled away suddenly and looked up at him.

"Your eyes are like your mother's," she said. "I used to have a scrapbook full of pictures of her."

"Your eyes are like your own and not a bit like any other eyes," he answered.

Something made Joel look into the grounds as they went into the house, as if Miles were lurking in the shrubbery. A telegram waited on the hall table. She read aloud:

CHICAGO

HOME TOMORROW NIGHT. THINKING OF YOU. LOVE.

MILES

"You see," she said, throwing the slip back on the table, "he could easily have faked that." She asked the butler for drinks and sandwiches and ran upstairs, while Joel walked into the empty reception rooms. Strolling about he wandered to the piano where he had stood in disgrace two Sundays before.

"Then we could put over," he said aloud, "a story of divorce, the younger generators and the Foreign Legion."

His thoughts jumped to another telegram.

"You were one of the most agreeable people at our party——"

An idea occurred to him. If Stella's telegram had been purely a gesture of courtesy then it was likely that Miles had inspired it, for it was Miles who had invited him. Probably Miles had said:

"Send him a wire—he's miserable—he thinks he's queered himself."

It fitted in with "I've influenced Stella in everything. Especially I've influenced her so that she likes all the men I like." A woman would do a thing like that because she felt sympathetic—only a man would do it because he felt responsible.

When Stella came back into the room he took both her hands.

"I have a strange feeling that I'm a sort of pawn in a spite game you're playing against Miles," he said.

"Help yourself to a drink."

"And the odd thing is that I'm in love with you anyhow."

The telephone rang and she freed herself to answer it.

"Another wire from Miles," she announced. "He dropped it, or it says he dropped it, from the airplane at Kansas City."

"I suppose he asked to be remembered to me."

"No, he just said he loved me. I believe he does. He's so very weak."

"Come sit beside me," Joel urged her.

It was early. And it was still a few minutes short of midnight a half hour later, when Joel walked to the cold hearth, and said tersely:

"Meaning that you haven't any curiosity about me?"

"Not at all. You attract me a lot and you know it. The point is that I suppose I really do love Miles."

"Obviously."

"And tonight I feel uneasy about everything."

He wasn't angry—he was even faintly relieved that a possible entanglement was avoided. Still as he looked at her, the warmth and softness of her body thawing her cold blue costume, he knew she was one of the things he would always regret.

"I've got to go," he said. "I'll phone a taxi."

"Nonsense—there's a chauffeur on duty."

He winced at her readiness to have him go, and seeing this she kissed him lightly and said, "You're sweet, Joel." Then suddenly three things happened: he took down his drink at a gulp, the phone rang loud through the house and a clock in the hall struck twelve in triumphant trumpet notes.

Nine—ten—eleven—twelve—

5

It was Sunday again. Joel realized that he had come to the theatre this evening with the work of the week still hanging about him like cerements. He had made love to Stella as he might attack some matter to be cleaned up hurriedly before the day's end. But this was Sunday—the lovely, lazy perspective of the next twenty-four hours unrolled before him—every minute was something to be approached with lulling indirection, every moment held the

germ of innumerable possibilities. Nothing was impossible—everything was just beginning. He poured himself another drink.

With a sharp moan, Stella slipped forward inertly by the telephone. Joel picked her up and laid her on the sofa. He squirted soda-water on a handkerchief and slapped it over her face. The telephone mouthpiece was still grinding and he put it to his ear.

"—the plane fell just this side of Kansas City. The body of Miles Calman has been identified and—"

He hung up the receiver.

"Lie still," he said, stalling, as Stella opened her eyes.

"Oh, what's happened?" she whispered. "Call them back. Oh, what's happened?"

"I'll call them right away. What's your doctor's name?"

"Did they say Miles was dead?"

"Lie quiet—is there a servant still up?"

"Hold me—I'm frightened."

He put his arm around her.

"I want the name of your doctor," he said sternly. "It may be a mistake but I want someone here."

"It's Doctor— Oh, God, is Miles dead?"

Joel ran upstairs and searched through strange medicine cabinets for spirits of ammonia. When he came down Stella cried:

"He isn't dead—I know he isn't. This is part of his scheme. He's torturing me. I know he's alive. I can feel he's alive."

"I want to get hold of some close friend of yours Stella. You can't stay here alone tonight."

"Oh, no," she cried, "I can't see anybody. You stay. I haven't got any friend." She got up, tears streaming down her face. "Oh, Miles is my only friend. He's not dead—he can't be dead. I'm going there right away and see. Get a train. You'll have to come with me."

"You can't. There's nothing to do tonight. I want you to tell me the name of some woman I can call: Lois? Joan? Carmel? Isn't there somebody?"

Stella stared at him blindly.

"Eva Goebel was my best friend," she said.

Joel thought of Miles, his sad and desperate face in the office two days before. In the awful silence of his death all was clear about him. He was the only American-born director with both an interesting temperament and an artistic conscience. Meshed in an

industry, he had paid with his ruined nerves for having no resilience, no healthy cynicism, no refuge—only a pitiful and precarious escape.

There was a sound at the outer door—it opened suddenly, and there were footsteps in the hall.

"Miles!" Stella screamed. "Is it you, Miles? Oh, it's Miles."

A telegraph boy appeared in the doorway.

"I couldn't find the bell. I heard you talking inside."

The telegram was a duplicate of the one that had been phoned. While Stella read it over and over, as though it were a black lie, Joel telephoned. It was still early and he had difficulty getting anyone; when finally he succeeded in finding some friends he made Stella take a stiff drink.

"You'll stay here, Joel," she whispered, as though she were half asleep. "You won't go away. Miles liked you—he said you—" She shivered violently, "Oh, my God, you don't know how alone I feel." Her eyes closed, "Put your arms around me. Miles had a suit like that." She started bolt upright. "Think of what he must have felt. He was afraid of almost everything, anyhow."

She shook her head dazedly. Suddenly she seized Joel's face and held it close to hers.

"You won't go. You like me—you love me, don't you? Don't call up anybody. Tomorrow's time enough. You stay here with me tonight."

He stared at her, at first incredulously, and then with shocked understanding. In her dark groping Stella was trying to keep Miles alive by sustaining a situation in which he had figured—as if Miles' mind could not die so long as the possibilities that had worried him still existed. It was a tortured effort to stave off the realization that he was dead.

Resolutely Joel went to the phone and called a doctor.

"Don't, oh, don't call anybody!" Stella cried. "Come back here and put your arms around me."

"Is Doctor Bales in?"

"Joel," Stella cried, "I thought I could count on you, Miles liked you. He was jealous of you—Joel, come here."

And then—if he betrayed Miles she would be keeping him alive—for if he were really dead how could he be betrayed?

"—has just had a very severe shock. Can you come at once, and get hold of a nurse?"

"Joel!"

Now the doorbell and the telephone began to ring intermittently, and automobiles were stopping in front of the door.

"But you're not going," Stella begged him. "You're going to stay, aren't you?"

"No," he answered. "But I'll be back if you need me."

Standing on the steps of the house which now hummed and palpitated with the life that flutters around death like protective leaves, he began to sob a little in his throat.

Everything he touched he did something magical to, he thought. He even brought that little gamine alive and made her a sort of masterpiece.

And then:

What a hell of a hole he leaves in this damn wilderness—already!

And then with a certain bitterness, Oh, yes, I'll be back—I'll be back!

VERNA



Paul Gallico

SOLDIERS abroad appreciate the great stars of stage and screen who gallantly sacrifice time, comfort, and safety to cross dangerous waters and play for them in their camps and areas within sound of the big guns and the crump of falling bombs. But the show people they really love and take to their hearts are the little, unheralded, unsung, hard-working wandering groups like Camp Shows Unit No. X117.

Unit No. X117 boasted no important stars, or anyone who had even been heard of outside of small localities. It was headed by a fat comedian named Eddie Stinson, recruited from the second-rate night-club circuit. Eddie had a round face and flabby jowls, and

when he came out wearing a too small derby on the top of his head, you knew he was going to be funny.

The rest of the troupe consisted of Sammy Sisk, who played the banjo and acted as master of ceremonies; a magician billed as The Great Zerbo; an accordionist, Pete Russo, who furnished the music; Connie Clay, a singer, who in private life was Mrs. Eddie Stinson; Maureen Pearl, an acrobatic dancer; and Verna Vane. Verna was Eddie's stooge.

This unit traveled the battle-torn lands of Europe, from Rouen to Reims to Strasbourg, from Strasbourg up to s'Hertogenbosch and Nijmegen and down again through Liège and into shell-shattered Aachen, playing their little vaudeville show in heat and cold, in dust and downpour, wherever there was a soldier audience that needed them, no matter how small.

Sometimes they performed in halls, but usually it was on a platform set up in some open field against a background of wrecked farm buildings, or black smoke mounting from the horizon, or a burned-out Tiger tank cocking the long barrel of its 88 to the sky like an admonishing finger. They were always within sound of the muttering guns. Sometimes the whine of an enemy shell would make discord to Pete Russo's music, or the distant querulous chaffing of automatic small arms would drown out Eddie's gags.

There were no prima donnas in the little troupe. None of them were any better than they should have been as performers, but they made up in zeal and sincerity what they lacked in polish. Their frequent proximity to the fighting lines, the occasional bombings or sporadic shells, excited more than frightened them. They rather gloried in their toughness and ability to take it when the going got rough, and they soon got used to the noise and the danger. The one exception was Verna. The war terrified her to her very marrow.

She did her best to conceal the palpitating fear that was always with her, and you might not have guessed how afraid she was unless you looked into her dark eyes and saw how haunted they were.

Her uniform of khaki slacks, heavy boots, and oversize field jacket with the winged insignia of the Camp Shows on the left shoulder made her look even smaller than she was. From beneath her steel helmet, balanced precariously on her small head, her hair, dyed to a light straw color, fell to her shoulders. The long black lashes that curled up from her blued eyelids were real, but the

color in her cheeks came from her make-up box and was spread thickly to hide her perpetual pallor.

Everything terrified her—the sudden coughing of a truck motor, the sight of tanks or guns, the proximity of side arms. When a C-47 transport plane flew overhead, she seemed to shrink together inside the bulky field jacket. She would start at any loud noise, and the sound of some machine gunner in a neighboring field clearing the barrels of his weapon preparatory to moving up brought on a violent trembling. She could not help herself. She was afraid of being hurt or of being killed. Her nerves were unable to gear themselves to war.

Verna's real name was Marie Wojcik, and she was a waif who came from somewhere around Chicago and the chorus line of cheap burlesque houses and third-rate floor shows. She had drifted east through Detroit and Pittsburgh, working and struggling for the break she was convinced would come some day. Verna was inseparably wedded to show business and what she referred to as her career. Her unquenchable ambition was stardom, and she was convinced that nothing could keep her from achieving it. She was absolutely unaware of her complete lack of talent for the stage.

It was while she was starving in New York that Verna joined Unit XI 17 to go overseas. It was steady work; she would eat; and above all, it was experience. And in the reaction of the first soldier audiences before whom she performed in the quiet of England, she thought she saw a kind of forecast of the triumphs her career would some day bring her. In their whoops and whistles and cheers and laughter she had a glimpse of the ovation that would take place on that night of nights when as the singing and dancing star of a musical-comedy hit she would shine before the smartest, most sophisticated, and wealthiest audience in the world. In her dream, rich men and poor would be at her feet, and the newspaper columns would be filled with her praises. She would wear diamonds and rubies.

For it was only the glittering superficialities of fame that attracted her and fired her ambition. She did not know there was something else, something deeper. And probably the reason she could not know was that there was nothing in her to give, beyond a quick generosity to others who like herself were lonely and on their own in a vast and overwhelming world.

Verna could neither sing, nor dance, nor walk, nor create illu-

sion, but she was pretty and could bare her thin, childlike body to be looked at and part her small pink mouth in a bright, fixed smile.

She had mastered the mechanics of a few time steps and had acquired one tap routine which she could perform stiffly and without rhythm to the music of "Little White Lies." Verna also had one song—if there was a microphone, for otherwise she could hardly be heard. With her eyes large and round with effort, she would purse her lips close to the mike and quaver something that went: "My yarms are so wempty (since you wenna way)."

Those were Verna's two specialties, but more often than not she didn't even get through them because Eddie Stinson, the fat comedian, used to break her up. That's the way the act was organized. It all depended on how Eddie was feeling and the way his gags were going over.

Verna was the first of the girls to appear during the performance. Sammy Sisk would step to the microphone and say: "And now we present that popular little singer of songs straight from the Stawk Club in Noo Yawk," a colossal lie which nobody ever questioned. "Come on up here, Verna." And Verna would come on, wearing nothing but a pair of silk tights with a small silver fringe around the hips and a spangled bra into which she usually put some padding because her little breasts did not quite fill it out. Her legs were too thin, but shapely.

Eddie Stinson would be on-stage too, smoking a big black cigar and wearing his too small derby hat, a ludicrous contrast to his khaki uniform. As soon as he caught sight of Verna he would pull violently on the cigar and emit clouds of smoke, and the GI's would holler and whistle and give the wolf call.

Then while Verna stood there making with the smile, Eddie would remove his cigar and ask the audience: "Are you guys thinking the same thing I am?" which brought forth yells and guffaws, and when those died away he fed them the topper: "I was wondering if it was gonna rain tomorrow?" which was good for another laugh.

And so it went, with Eddie Stinson mugging and making cracks, or getting behind Verna and clowning while she sang, and sometimes you might hear a line or two of her song or a couple of taps, but more often you would not because of the laughter. At the end, however, when Verna retired she would always get a terrific hand.

Sometimes they would keep right on applauding and she would have to take a bow.

It was curious the way the soldiers liked her. Verna thought it was her performance. She did not know that she was so amateurish that she did not project at all as an entertainer, but the soldiers just enjoyed looking at her because she was so skinny and kind of earnest, wistful, and helpless and reminded them of kids they all knew back home. . . .

The troupe crossed over into France, and Verna came up against something she could not handle. Outside of Vervins, the first time the Luftwaffe night bombers came over and tried to plaster a troop concentration a half mile away, she cowered in a corner of the cellar and hid her face and howled. Thereafter even at the distant sound of airplane motors she would begin to whimper, disturbing the rest of Maureen Pearl, the dancer with whom she shared quarters.

Rides in jeeps and trucks over the roads of France with their ever present warning signs: MINES CLEARED TO DITCHES, were an agony of apprehension to her. As they moved up closer to the lines, the ceaseless thudding and rumbling of artillery, coupled with the occasional whine of a shell exploding a mile or so away, added to her terrors, and the distant sound of small-arms fire brought on fits of uncontrollable trembling.

Only during the brief minutes when she was on-stage did Verna appear to regain control of herself. Whenever and wherever they played, she would appear in her little pants and bra, to give out with the smile, mutter her song, and do her dance while Eddie Stinson clowned.

She grew thinner and hollow-cheeked under the strain, and Eddie Stinson, who was a kindly person, discussed sending her home. When it was put up to Verna, she flatly refused to go. She cried and begged and promised not to disturb anyone any more. She admitted she could not help being frightened, but swore that nobody would ever know about it again.

The members of the unit wondered why Verna wanted to stay when she was so unfit for it, and Zerbo the magician came closest to the answer when he said: "The kid thinks she's a trouper. Maybe she's got more guts than all of us."

Verna did think she was a trouper. It did not fit into the pattern

of her career as a future musical-comedy star to quit when the going got rough. She lived by slogans and catch phrases. "The show must go on," was one of them. Too, something in her heart had been touched by the drawn, dog-tired faces of the fighting men. Their weary attitudes and harried eyes, their terrible loneliness, awakened echoes of her own loneliness and struggles. She was happiest when she was bringing them cheer and forgetfulness with her art. If she went away, she felt something would be taken away from them and they would be disappointed.

For she was convinced that she gave delight with her performance and did not recognize that what little art was connected with it belonged to Eddie Stinson. Of the memory of her that remained indelibly in the minds of the soldiers who saw the little show—a sweet, awkward kid from back home—a memory that remained long after Eddie Stinson's jokes had been forgotten, and the men lay in their foxholes or moved forward under fire, she had no conception.

But she kept tighter rein upon herself and through the dreadful rumbling nights stifled her sobs in the khaki field blankets so as not to wake Maureen, and the members of the troupe respected her effort and refrained from kidding her, and even stopped making cracks about her "career," which, if anything, was more of a trial to them than her nervous reaction to the dangers of war.

During periods in quiet sectors, when the threat of imminent dissolution seemed removed and the strain was off her, Verna chattered ceaselessly about her career. Everything was made to have a bearing on this career, which was to culminate when she got her break in a Broadway show. She knew the names of all the critics and big shots who would be there; she envisioned where she would live, and the parties that would be given, and the clothes and furs she would have, and the stories in the newspapers. She wouldn't drink whisky because it might hurt her voice, and refrained from smoking for the same reason; she practiced her time steps ceaselessly and all in all went maddeningly on the nerves of the other members of the troupe.

While they were no stars themselves, they were professionals and competent in their lines and it was more than obvious to them not only that would Verna never make the grade, but that she could not even get and hold a job in the chorus line of a modern Broadway show. They knew their own limitations, and it irritated

them that one so wholly lacking in talent and ability should ceaselessly din her aspirations in their ears. They were too harassed to realize that there is a certain divinity in such blindness and yearning as Verna displayed.

The Germans retreated across France and Belgium, the Americans and British and Canadians pursued them, and Unit X117 tramped close behind the advancing armies. In Liège, where the show spent a week, Verna met a young captain of engineers by the name of Walter Hruban who fell in love with her, and she, as much as she was able, with him.

Captain Hruban was a stocky blond boy from Calumet, Michigan, with innocent blue eyes and muscular body. He was engaged in the construction of a supply depot in the vicinity of Liège. He saw Verna at a Saturday-night show and she went straight to his heart. He contrived to meet her, and his shy adoration of her was as apparent to the other members of the troupe as it was to Verna.

Verna liked him first and then loved him. He was not like the other officers or enlisted men who hung around her, eying her hungrily or merely using her presence to ease the loneliness or homesickness that was in them. From the very first, Walter Hruban made her feel that she was the sun that rose and set upon his happiness, the moon and the stars and the universe to him. It was a new sensation to her to be so genuinely loved, and it warmed a response in her. She became giddy, lovesick, and wholly human for the four days of their courtship, during which they were inseparable.

The members of the troupe watched with eyes that were fond rather than cynical, for it seemed a just and sweet solution to the problems of Verna. Maureen Pearl was even a little jealous, for Hruban had exuberant masculinity.

On the fifth day Captain Hruban asked Verna to marry him. They could be married right there—he would get permission from his superior officers. Then Verna could go back to the States and stay with his family until the war was over, when he would return and join her.

Verna disengaged herself from his arms and said: "Gee, Walter, you're sweet. I wish I could."

He took her hands and held them to give force to his persuasion. "But why can't you, honey? You know I'm crazy about you. I'll do anything to make you happy. You love me, don't you, honey?"

When she looked at Walter, his tanned face with the yearning blue eyes shining out of it, it made her feel all choked up. She said earnestly: "Gee, Walter, I love you so much it makes me wanna bust."

"Then why can't we get married, honey? Look, I could fix it so—"

Verna pulled her hands out of his. "Hones', I can't, on accounta my career."

The boy looked startled as he contemplated this unexpected obstacle and then came immediately to the solution. "Aw, why, gee, honey. You could go on with the stage after we were married. I wouldn't stand in your way. If you wanted to do that until I got back, why—"

Verna refused to look at him. "It ain't that, Walter, but when you have a career, you hadn't ought to marry."

"Gosh! I don't see why not. Plenty of actresses marry."

"Yeah, but it don't last. They always get a divorce. You're too sweet, Walter. I wouldn't want you should get mixed up in all that kind of thing."

"Why, but, honey! I wouldn't want to divorce you—ever. Why should we if we care for each other?"

Verna conjured up the familiar pictures of the future she had so long made for herself, pictures that were more real than life itself: Verna in furs and wraps, with her limousine and chauffeurs and her name in lights. And she even thought she could read lines from some future gossip column: "Verna Vane, the musical comet-y star will have it Reno-vated. She and her groom have occupied separate establishments for a year." The thought gave her a little thrill. To Hruban she said: "You don' unnerstand, Walter. It's different in the theatre. Some day I'm gonna be a big star." And she went on to tell about the great future that awaited her, and the sacrifices that had to be made to realize it. Because she believed in it, she made Walter believe it too, and, heartsick, he felt her slipping from him. He had nothing to offer her but himself, love and marriage, and with a sigh he realized that he had aspired too high. The glory and the brilliance that would some day be Verna's were not for such as he, and a new kind of awe came into his attitude toward her.

That night, after the show, they were together in his quarters when the flying bombs came over, their motors throbbing and

popping and stamping in the night sky, and Verna began to tremble and shake as they listened for the cut-out, and Walter took her in his arms and said: "Gee, honey, don't be afraid. They never come down around here."

But one did, a few hundred yards away, and the pregnant silence that followed the shocking discontinuance of its obscene passage was annihilated by a shattering explosion that rocked the building, and the night was filled with cries and the tinkling of broken glass.

Verna clung to Hruban, crying hysterically: "Oh, God, I'm so scared! Oh, hold me tight. Don't let me hear any more; don't let me see anything. I'm so terrible scared, I jus' can't stan' any more."

Hruban held her tightly and let her hide her face. He kissed her and tried to stop her trembling, and when she answered his kiss he said: "Why, you're nothing but a poor frightened kid. I'm gonna look after you. You're mine."

She stayed all night with him, gratitude mingling with passion, love with the need to find escape from fear and loneliness. Walter mistook the warmth and generosity that was a side of her nature and in the morning talked again of their marriage.

But the dreadful night had yielded to a cheerful sun, lighting a bright blue day, and as the memories of darkness receded, Verna produced her career again. He was sweet, she loved him awfully, but she had to think about her future.

She left him miserable and baffled. He could not understand or reconcile the two Vernas, one the actress, the great star she had convinced him she would be, and the other the trembling, shaken child who had crawled to him for comfort.

Two days later the unit with Verna moved into captured Aachen.

It was while they were there that Maureen Pearl asked Verna: "What about that nice kid back in Liège? He wanted to marry you, didn't he?"

Verna, who was mending her tights, looked up. "Oh, sure."

Maureen was a big dark girl with a wide mouth and an acid disposition. Verna's complacency infuriated her. Didn't the little fool know the real thing when she saw it? She asked: "Well?"

"Oh, I couldn' marry him," Verna said, "on accounta my career."

"Oh, for God's sake, your career!"

Verna shook her head. "I don't think it's right for people in our

perfection to get married—I mean, if you're gonna be a big star. I went for him in a big way, only it would have interfered with—"

Maureen interrupted bitterly: "You little sap! Letting a chance go by to grab a sweet kid who was nuts about you. You ought to have your ears slapped. Your career! It's time somebody told you the facts of life, baby. You're having your career right now. That's all there is, sister. You can't sing, you can't dance, you can't act, you can't even walk. You haven't got the talent of a trained flea. You'll never do any better in show business than you're doing right this minute. Why don't you get wise to yourself?"

Verna looked up from the silver-fringed tights on her lap and with no ire whatsoever said: "Oh, you're just jealous, Maureen," and went back to her sewing, wrapped in the unassailable cloak of her conviction, leaving Maureen in a kind of helpless anger that assuaged itself in spiteful thoughts of the bitter lot that would be Verna's in the future. She would face failure after failure until the flash beauty of her youth faded and all hope vanished forever.

Unit X117 found itself in Bastogne when the von Rundstedt offensive exploded upon the shocked American forces. The little troupe, shepherded by a Lieutenant Jed Smith, a Special Services officer assigned to guide them, tried to escape from the town and drove smack into positions held by German Royal Tiger tanks. They got their jeeps turned around and fled back into town, pursued by machine-gun fire, with Verna screaming hysterically all the way.

With the town surrounded, the lieutenant found them a deep cellar beneath a shell-battered schoolhouse, and there they cowered for five days listening to the shocking din of the battle overhead, with Verna hiding under a blanket, more dead than alive from pure terror.

The other members of the troupe were badly frightened too, for while the lieutenant tried to minimize the danger, it was one thing to be behind the lines of battle within range of an occasional shell, and quite another to be in the center of a vicious German drive and completely surrounded. To the terrors of bombardment and the ceaseless "*Cha-cha-cha-cha-cha*" of automatic weapons fire, the sharp "*Brrrrrrp!*" of the German machine pistols in the woods on the edge of town, was added the fear of capture and consignment to a German concentration camp until the war's end.

The cellar was filled with the stink of burned cordite and smoke from nearby burning buildings. Later another odor was added, as wounded men were brought there. There were no nurses, and not enough medical corpsmen were available. Maureen Pearl, Connie Clay, and the men of the unit did what they could for the casualties. Verna was utterly useless. She lay on some straw covered by a blanket, her shoulders shaking and her teeth chattering ceaselessly.

Christmas morning Lieutenant Smith came down into the cellar and addressed the unit. He said: "Look, things aren't so bad any more. We've pushed 'em back beyond the edge of town. There's supposed to be a column of our tanks about five miles away. Anyway, the Krauts haven't got us yet. How about putting on a show for the guys who can get to it, this afternoon? They'd sure appreciate it. We could fix up a place in the schoolhouse upstairs, with a stove, maybe."

Nobody said anything at first. Eddie Stinson looked down and swallowed. Zerbo muttered: "You can have that, brother." Sammy Sisk tried a gag: "How would I look without a head?" but nobody laughed. The fat comedian finally said: "Well, I dunno."

The lieutenant gazed from one to the other and said: "I wouldn't want you to do anything you didn't feel like doing. It's up to you. We got a lotta walking wounded that would get a hell of a kick out of a show. Why don't you put it to a vote? Whatever you say goes."

Eddie said: "O. K. We'll take a vote and stick by it. I vote yes. If the lieutenant says it's safe, I guess it's all right."

Connie Clay and Sammy Sisk agreed with him. Pete Russo, Zerbo, and Maureen Pearl voted no. Eddie Stinson said: "That's three and three." They all looked at Verna shaking in her corner and knew there'd be no show, but Eddie went through the motions, anyway.

He called over: "Verna! The lieutenant wants us to give a show this afternoon. We're taking a vote. What about you, kid? How about giving 'em a little of the old song and danceroo?"

The quiet that followed his question was broken only by the moaning of a boy with a shell fragment through his hip. Then Verna sat bolt upright staring at them out of her fear-haunted eyes. She was trying to say something, but the chattering of her teeth would not let her, so instead she nodded her head. And the nod was yes.

Pete Russo said: "Well, for cryin' out loud! I thought you'd be the last one to be that dumb."

Maureen said bitterly: "Our little heroine! The show's gotta go on! She cannot disappoint her audience. Nuts!"

Verna just nodded again. Eddie said: "O. K., lieutenant. Four to three. I guess we'll put on some kind of a show."

It was bitter cold in the schoolroom on Christmas afternoon. There was one small kerosene stove up on the platform, but the wind and snow that swirled in through the shattered windows nullified its heat.

The enclosure was packed to the doors with soldiers, the walking wounded in their blood-soaked bandages; men relieved from the lines, steel-helmeted, their carbines or tommy guns cradled in their arms; jeep-drivers, supply men, paratroopers, cooks, Signal Corps boys, engineers, crews out of disabled tanks.

Outside, but more distantly, the sounds of the battle still raged, the rattling clank of tanks and half-tracks mingling with the short bursts of automatic-rifle fire, the irritable whine of shells, and the "poom-poom-poom" of the quarreling tanks; aircraft snarled overhead.

And there on Christmas Day Unit XI17 gave its show, bundled to the ears against the cold, with the notable exception of Verna. When Sammy Sisk said: "And now, fellers, I take pleasure in presenting that popular little singer of songs straight from the Stawk Club in New Yawk, Miss Verna Vane," Verna came on in her little silk panties with the silver fringe and the padded spangled brassière holding up her little breasts. Only at the insistence of the lieutenant was she wearing her steel helmet athwart her yellow hair.

When she came out, Eddie Stinson blew clouds of cigar smoke, and the men yelled and cheered. He said: "Well, look what Sanny Claus brought!" and they whooped. He said: "Howdja like to find that in your stocking?" and they howled.

Somehow Verna had managed to stop the chattering of her teeth, and she was giving with the smile. She had applied body make-up, but underneath she was blue with cold. There was no microphone, and when she opened her mouth to sing, only a croak came out; it was drowned by a burst of fifty-millimeter firing from

the edge of town, and Eddie hollered: "Quiet!" and got another laugh.

Pete Russo switched into "Little White Lies," and Verna struck her taps against the floor while Eddie Stinson said in a loud aside: "She just does that to keep warm!" and clowned through the number with her, and when it was over, the sound of the cheers and the applause drowned out the ugly symphony of war, and Verna just stood there, smiling and looking like that shy, good-natured kid from back home while the soldiers stamped and whistled and wolf-called and not one of them so much as guessed that for her this had been a kind of Gethsemane.

When Bastogne was relieved and the road southwest was again clear, Camp Shows Unit No. XI17 was the first to drive out to safety after the wounded, and within a few hours was away from the sound of the hammering guns. Afterwards there was even a little publicity in the papers about the unit that was trapped in Bastogne and that gave a show on Christmas Day, though of course there was no mention of Verna.

It was several weeks later that the unit was headed west toward Mons to play in a hospital there, rolling over paved roads in a safe and quiet area in a four-jeep caravan. Verna was riding in the last jeep with a corporal who was telling her that she was a pretty cute trick.

It was a winter day of gray clouds with a threat of more weather, and the roads were deep in snow and ice, so they drove carefully. There was not even aircraft overhead to disturb the quiet beauty of the winter landscape.

Then from ahead there came a deep rumbling with overtones of noisy clanking. Verna's hands flew to her breast, and she said: "Oh, God!"

The corporal smiled and said: "Take it easy, kid; that's just a column of Shermans moving up. But we'd better get the hell off the road until they get by. Those damn things are liable to skid all over on this ice."

The three lead jeeps had already pulled off the road and into a field through an opening in a fence. The corporal put the jeep into its heavy traction gear and swung through the gate and wide of the other two cars. There was a kind of click and a whirring

as a dark object leaped up out of the snow to the right of the jeep and the next instant exploded with a jarring roar and a dirty mushroom of black smoke.

The corporal was wounded in the hand and the thigh by bits of shrapnel, but Verna never knew what hit her. She slumped quietly out of the side of the jeep and lay there in the snow, head down, a little, quiet, tattered khaki bundle that would never move again.

The others had piled out of the lead jeeps and came running over as the corporal yelled: "God, a German *Sprengmine!* We musta hit the wire under the snow. Somebody look after the kid. I'm hit."

But they saw at once that there was no longer any need to do so. Connie and Maureen knelt sobbing in the snow by her side while the men stood looking down helplessly at the hole torn through her steel helmet, and the gray tanks with their admonishing guns pointed straight forward rumbled past the little tragedy in the field, without pausing. Eddie Stinson, his fat jowls shaking, repeated over and over again: "Oh, the poor kid. The poor damn little kid."

The mortal remains of Verna Vane of necessity gathered accompanying papers, a dossier that included the manner of the end that had come to her. As a matter of routine the report crossed the desk of a Colonel Speed McIvor, once a publicity director for Magna Pictures in Hollywood, but now a Public Relations officer.

He glanced at it idly, then picked it up and read it through, his fingers reaching for the row of buzzers on his desk. He pushed them all. A major, two captains, a lieutenant and a WAC sergeant materialized.

"Hey," the colonel said, "what about this Verna Vane who was killed by a mine near Mons? Who is she?"

The major began to explain, but the colonel, who had a hair-trigger mind, was 'way ahead of him. He interrupted, talking in short, rapid sentences:

"Jees, it's a story, isn't it? What are we sitting around for? First girl from a camp show killed in combat. Well, it was a mine, wasn't it? It says there's no next of kin. Poor kid must be an orphan. Ought to have a bang-up military funeral. Gave her life for her country, didn't she? Guys firing a volley over her grave.

Hell, we can do better than that in this town. Do it in a big church. Who's the guy in charge of Notre-Dame Cathedral? Get him on the phone. The kid was in that show that was trapped in Bastogne. That's a great yarn, isn't it? Make every paper in the States. The general might even come. Get me his adjutant on the phone. See that a piece gets into *Stars and Stripes*. Put in a call for the ranking chaplain. Find out about getting a guard of honor. Boom! We're in business. Beat it, everybody!"

The rest of that day, by methods known only to a live wire from Hollywood, considerable red tape was snipped, and a piece appeared in *Stars and Stripes* the next morning to the effect that the general would attend funeral services in Notre-Dame on Sunday for Verna Vane, American girl killed in action.

The colonel moved fast, but thereafter events over which he had no control began to move even faster. With the publication of the item in the soldiers' newspaper, word was permitted to sift through that a certain highly placed French Personage was miffed that he had not been asked to attend a ceremony important enough to call out the presence of the American general.

The colonel burned up three telephone wires, and the Personage was invited and accepted. McIvor thereupon made his first acquaintance with something known as protocol, and his telephones were very busy. Also the colonel began to sweat. He had only been trying to organize a good story for back home. Now it was too late to back out.

It seemed there was a Russian general heading a military mission in Paris. There were also Dutch, Belgians, and Poles, Norwegians, Yugoslavs, and Brazilians, not to mention dignitaries from Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, and a marshal from Great Britain. The presence of the American general along with the French Personage at the ceremony made it imperative they be invited, if Allied solidarity was to be preserved. The colonel did a rush job on invitations.

The cathedral choir offered its services, and the F.F.I. sent a delegation and a wreath. The Air Forces said they'd better be in on the show if the colonel wanted any more transportation, and a colonel of Artillery sent a sharp note demanding to know whether they were the forgotten branch. There was some bitterness as to which of the two senior chaplains should read the service.

But, at that, things worked out better than might have been

expected, and on a cold but sunny January afternoon in Paris, passing through an aisle of massed tanks and half-tracks, Verna Vane arrived on a gun caisson for her first and last world première.

She had really achieved everything her poor little heart had ever desired. Her wrap, the stars and stripes that draped her coffin, was of silk, and upon it she wore the jewels she had craved so much. For while her own country had deposited only the modest Purple Heart upon her casket, the more expansive and slightly bewildered Russians had taken no chances and sent the Order of Suvorov in gold and enamel and diamonds. The Belgians awarded the Order of Leopold, and the Dutch the Order of William, a white cross surmounted by a jeweled crown.

Ten thousand candles flickered down the great nave of Notre-Dame, and the winking reflection of their myriad lights glittered from the benedaled breasts of the great gathering of notables from every Allied land. The American general was flanked by the French Personage on one side and the gleaming Russian general on the other, and then, rank on rank, sat the dashing, colorful military and the more somber diplomats.

And the ten thousand candles shone upon young grave faces and row upon row of khaki uniforms, for the GI's on leave in Paris had come to be Verna's audience.

None of the glittering foreign dignitaries had the slightest idea who Verna Vane was, or cared, but the doughboys knew. They had seen her at Rennes and Le Mans and Nancy, outside of Metz and north of Luxembourg, in Brussels and Liège and Maastricht, in shattered Aachen and besieged Bastogne, and they remembered the thin girl in the little pants and the thingamajig across her chest who couldn't sing or dance a hell of a lot, but who had stood there smiling wistfully at them while she took an awful lot of kidding from that fat guy. They remembered how she had reminded them of all those sweet kids back home. . . .

There was music too for this big show, the booming of the great organ and the swelling of the choir intoning the majestic Mass, and while the glorious chant rose to the vaulted roof, an Air Forces Piper Cub flew overhead and dropped a wreath on the square outside the church and the artillery pieces lined along the Seine thudded the last salute.

The members of Camp Shows Unit No. XI 17 were there, at the side of the cathedral behind the dignitaries.

The Great Zerbo said: "It's funny, isn't it, about her and her career? She got it, anyway."

Sammy Sisk said: "Gee, this is better than Madison Square Garden."

Eddie Stinson's fat jowls shook, and he kept repeating: "The poor damn kid."

Maureen Pearl said to Connie: "If the poor thing had used the brains she was born with and married that guy who was so crazy about her, this never would have happened," but Connie only wept and said: "Oh, I think it's so beautiful."

Sitting jammed between khaki-clad figures, far back, so that the distant shining casket was but one tiny brighter drop in the great pool of light in the center of the cathedral, was a captain of engineers who too was remembering Verna. He was recalling that once this being, this glamorous star, now so far, so very far removed from him, had lain sobbing in his arms, crying: "Oh, God, I'm so scared! Oh, hold me tight!"

He had held her tightly to his heart, and for that enchanted moment she had been his. And he said a small prayer and was profoundly grateful for the wonder and the beauty of the thing that had happened to him, Walter Hruban, just one guy in a hell of a big army.

As must end all shows, so this one too came to a close with the last rolling chords of the organ, and when the audience had filed out of the cathedral they placed the casket upon the caisson once more, the guard of honor lined up behind, and they took Verna to the American cemetery, fired the farewell volley, and there buried her with her shattered steel helmet hung over the small, plain white cross that marked the haven of her final exit.

ACME



John Galsworthy

IN THESE days no man of genius need starve. The following story of my friend Bruce may be taken as proof of this assertion. Nearly sixty when I first knew him, he must have written already some fifteen books, which had earned him the reputation of "a genius" with the few who know. He used to live in York Street, Adelphi, where he had two rooms up the very shaky staircase of a house chiefly remarkable for the fact that its front door seemed always open. I suppose there never was a writer more indifferent to what people thought of him. He profoundly neglected the Press—not with one of those neglects which grow on writers from reading reviews of their own works—he seemed never to read criticism, but with the basic neglect of "an original," a nomadic spirit, a stranger in modern civilisation, who would leave his attics for long months of wandering, and come back there to hibernate and write a book. He was a tall, thin man, with a face rather like Mark Twain's, black eyebrows which bristled and shot up, a bitten drooping grey moustache, and fuzzy grey hair; but his eyes were like owl's eyes, piercing, melancholy, dark brown, and gave to his rugged face an extraordinary expression of a spirit remote from the flesh which had captured it. He was a bachelor, who seemed to avoid women; perhaps they had "learned" him that; for he must have been very attractive to them.

The year of which I write had been to my friend Bruce the devil, monetarily speaking. With his passion for writing that for which his Age had no taste—what could he expect? His last book had been a complete frost. He had undergone, too, an operation which had cost him much money and left him very weak. When I went to see him that October, I found him stretched out on two

chairs, smoking the Brazilian cigarettes which he affected—and which always affected me, so black and strong they were, in their yellow maize-leaf coverings. He had a writing-pad on his knee, and sheets of paper scattered all around. The room had a very meagre look. I had not seen him for a year and more, but he looked up at me as if I'd been in yesterday.

"Hallo!" he said; "I went into a thing they call a cinema last night. Have you ever been?"

"Ever been? Do you know how long the cinema has been going? Since about 1900."

"Well! What a *thing*! I'm writing a skit on it!"

"How—a skit?"

"Parody—wildest yarn you ever read."

He took up a sheet of paper and began chuckling to himself.

"My heroine," he said, "is an Octoroon. Her eyes swim, and her lovely bosom heaves. Everybody wants her, and she's more virtuous than words can say. The situations she doesn't succumb to would freeze your blood; they'd roast your marrow. She has a perfect devil of a brother, with whom she was brought up, and who knows her deep dark secret and wants to trade her off to a millionaire who also has a deep dark secret. Altogether there are four deep dark secrets in my yarn. It's a corker."

"What a waste of your time!" I said.

"My time!" he answered fiercely. "What's the use of my time? Nobody buys my books."

"Who's attending you?"

"Doctors! They take your money, that's all. I've got no money. Don't talk about me!" Again he took up a sheet of manuscript and chuckled.

"Last night—at that place—they had—good God!—a race between a train and a motorcar. Well, I've got one between a train, a motorcar, a flying machine, and a horse."

I sat up.

"May I have a look at your skit," I said, "when you've finished it?"

"It is finished. Wrote it straight off. D'you think I could stop and then go on again with a thing like that?" He gathered the sheets and held them out to me. "Take the thing—it's amused me to do it. The heroine's secret is that she isn't an Octoroon at all; she's a De La Casse—purest Creole blood of the South; and her

villainous brother isn't her brother; and the bad millionaire isn't a millionaire; and her penniless lover is. It's rich, I tell you!"

"Thanks," I said drily, and took the sheets.

I went away concerned about my friend, his illness, and his poverty, especially his poverty, for I saw no end to it.

After dinner that evening I began languidly to read his skit. I had not read two pages of the thirty-five before I started up, sat down again, and feverishly read on. Skit! By George! He had written a perfect scenario—or, rather, that which wanted the merest professional touching-up to be perfect. I was excited. It was a little gold mine if properly handled. Any good film company, I felt convinced, would catch at it. Yes! But how to handle it? Bruce was such an unaccountable creature, such a wild old bird! Imagine his having only just realised the cinema! If I told him his skit was a serious film, he would say: "Good God!" and put it in the fire, priceless though it was. And yet, how could I market it without *carte blanche*, and how get *carte blanche* without giving my discovery away? I was deathly keen on getting some money for him; and this thing, properly worked, might almost make him independent. I felt as if I had a priceless museum piece which a single stumble might shatter to fragments. The tone of his voice when he spoke of the cinema—"What a *thing*!" kept coming back to me. He was prickly proud, too—very difficult about money. Could I work it without telling him anything? I knew he never looked at a newspaper. But should I be justified in taking advantage of that—in getting the thing accepted and produced without his knowing? I revolved the question for hours, and went to see him again next day.

He was reading.

"Hallo! You again? What do you think of this theory—that the Egyptians derive from a Saharan civilisation?"

"I don't think," I said. sm

"It's nonsense. This fellow—" sn' ^n

I interrupted him. "T" T

"Do you want that skit back, or can I keep it?"

"Skit? What skit?"

"The thing you gave me yesterday."

"That! Light your fire with it. This fellow—"

"Yes," I said; "I'll light a fire with it. I see you're busy."

"Oh, no! I'm not," he said. "I've nothing to do. What's the good

of my writing? I earn less and less with every book that comes out. I'm dying of poverty."

"That's because you won't consider the public."

"How can I consider the public when I don't know what they want?"

"Because you won't take the trouble to find out. If I suggested a way to you of pleasing the public and making money, you'd kick me out of the room."

And the words: "For instance, I've got a little gold mine of yours in my pocket," were on the tip of my tongue, but I choked them back. "Daren't risk it!" I thought. "He's given you the thing. *Carte blanche—cartes serrés!*"

I took the gold mine away and promptly rough-shaped it for the film. It was perfectly easy, without any alteration of the story. Then I was faced with the temptation to put his name to it. The point was this: If I took it to a film company as an authorless scenario, I should only get authorless terms; whereas, if I put his name to it, with a little talking I could double the terms at least. The film public didn't know his name, of course, but the inner literary public did, and it's wonderful how you can impress the market with the word "genius" judiciously used. It was too dangerous, however; and at last I hit on a middle course. I would take it to them with no name attached, but tell them it was by "a genius," and suggest that they could make capital out of the incognito. I knew they would feel it *was* by a genius.

I took it to an excellent company next day, with a covering note saying: "The author, a man of recognised literary genius, for certain reasons prefers to remain unknown." They took a fortnight in which to rise, but they rose. They had to. The thing was too good in itself. For a week I played them over terms. Twice I delivered an ultimatum—twice they surrendered; they knew too well what they had got. I could have made a contract with £2,000 down which would have brought me at least another £2,000 before the contract term closed; but I compromised for one that gave me £3,000 down, as likely to lead to less trouble with Bruce. The terms were not a whit too good for what was really the "acme" of scenarios. If I could have been quite open, I should certainly have done better. Finally, however, I signed the contract, delivered the manuscript, and received a cheque for the price. I was elated, and at the same time knew that my troubles were just beginning. With Bruce's

feeling about the film, how the deuce should I get him to take the money? Could I go to his publishers and conspire with them to trickle it out to him gradually, as if it came from his books? That meant letting them into the secret; besides, he was too used to receiving practically nothing from his books; it would lead him to make enquiry, and the secret was bound to come out. Could I get a lawyer to spring an inheritance on him? That would mean no end of lying and elaboration, even if a lawyer would consent. Should I send him the money in Bank of England notes, with the words: "From a lifelong admirer of your genius"? I was afraid he would suspect a trick, or stolen notes, and go to the police to trace them. Or should I just go, put the cheque on the table, and tell him the truth?

The question worried me terribly, for I didn't feel entitled to consult others who knew him. It was the sort of thing that, if talked over, would certainly leak out. It was not desirable, however, to delay cashing a big cheque like that. Besides, they had started on the production. It happened to be a slack time, with a dearth of good films, so that they were rushing it on. And in the meantime there was Bruce—starved of everything he wanted, unable to get away for want of money, depressed about his health and his future. And yet so completely had he always seemed to me different, strange, superior to this civilisation of ours, that the idea of going to him and saying simply: "This is yours, for the film you wrote," scared me. I could hear his: "T? Write for the cinema? What do you mean?"

When I came to think of it, I had surely taken an extravagant liberty in marketing the thing without consulting him. I felt he would never forgive that, and my feeling towards him was so affectionate, even reverential, that I simply hated the idea of being cast out of his affections. At last I hit on a way that by introducing my own interest might break my fall. I cashed the cheque, lodged the money at my bank, drew my own cheque on it for the full amount, and armed with that and the contract, went to see him.

He was lying on two chairs, smoking his Brazilians, and playing with a stray cat which had attached itself to him. He seemed rather less prickly than usual, and after beating about the bushes of his health and other matters, I began:

"I've got a confession to make, Bruce."

"Confession!" he said. "What confession?"

"You remember that skit on the film you wrote, and gave me, about six weeks ago?"

"No."

"Yes, you do—about an Octoroon."

He chuckled. "Oh! Ah! That!"

I took a deep breath, and went on:

"Well, I sold it; and the price of course belongs to you."

"What? Who'd print a thing like that?"

"It isn't printed. It's been made into a film—superfilm, they call it."

His hand came to a pause on the cat's back, and he glared at me. I hastened on:

"I ought to have told you what I was doing, but you're so prickly, and you've got such confounded superior notions. I thought if I did, you'd be biting off your nose to spite your own face. The fact is, it made a marvellous scenario. Here's the contract, and here's a cheque on my bank for the price—£3,000. If you like to treat me as your agent, you owe me £300. I don't expect it, but I'm not proud, like you, and I shan't sneeze."

"Good God!" he said.

"Yes, I know. But it's all nonsense, Bruce. You can carry scruples to altogether too great length. Tainted source! Everything's tainted, if you come to that. The film's a quite justified expression of modern civilisation—a natural outcome of the Age. It gives amusement; it affords pleasure. It may be vulgar, it may be cheap, but we *are* vulgar, and we *are* cheap, and it's no use pretending we're not—not you, of course, Bruce, but people at large. A vulgar Age wants vulgar amusement, and if we can give it that amusement, we ought to; life's not too cheery, anyway."

The glare in his eyes was almost paralysing me, but I managed to stammer on:

"You live out of the world—you don't realise what humdrum people want; something to balance the greyness, the—the banality of their lives. They want blood, thrill, sensation of all sorts. You didn't mean to give it them, but you have, you've done them a benefit, whether you wish to or not, and the money's yours and you've got to take it."

The cat suddenly jumped down. I waited for the storm to burst.

"I know," I dashed on, "that you hate and despise the film—"

Suddenly his voice boomed out:

"Bosh! What are you talking about? Film! I go there every other night."

It was my turn to say: "Good God!" And, ramming contract and cheque into his empty hand, I bolted, closely followed by the cat.

ACTOR'S BLOOD



Ben Hecht

THE DEATH of a famous actress is the signal, as a rule, for a great deal of maudlin excitement. The world that knew her rushes up on that last stage where she lies with her eyes sincerely closed and joins, as it were, in her death scene, posturing and poetizing around her bier like a pack of amateur mummers. For a few days everyone who knew her is a road company Marc Antony burying her with bad oratory. The stage is a respectable and important institution, what with its enormous real estate holdings, but we still patronize an actress, particularly a dead one.

Marcia Tillayou's death let loose an unusual amount of "Alas, poor Yorick" poses among the laity because she was found in her apartment one summer morning with three bullets, all of them through her heart. This struck everybody as almost too rich a scenario to believe, that so glamorous, beautiful and witty a woman should add murder to the excitement of her dying.

We who were her friends were not exactly delighted. But there's no denying the thrill that lay in that denouement. Even to her intimates the whole business of mystery surrounding that dead and beautiful body seemed more dramatic than real, seemed more a performance than the ending of a life. Not Marcia lay in this bed of death, but another of those exotic and witty characterizations for which she was famous.

As for the Press, it was honestly and naïvely grateful. It is seldom that an interesting, let alone famous, woman gets murdered.

Our murder victims are in the main the dullest and most depressing of stooges. The best that tragedy has to offer the city editors is an occasional chorus girl and more rarely someone sufficiently well dressed to warrant the word *Society* in the headlines.

Marcia's exit kept the presses roaring. There was inexhaustible color to the mystery, and there was more bad writing and idiotic sleuthing than had distinguished the news columns for some time—a month at least. A life-sized portrait of Marcia as Pierrette hanging over the "murder bed" had been slashed across the middle. The furniture of the gaudy room had been smashed. Her satin-hung dressing table with its glass top and hundred perfume bottles had been demolished. All in all it looked as if Marcia had been done to death by a herd of bison. But the police and the newspapers chose to regard the attendant ravages as the work of a Love Fiend.

Since these matters and all the clues and surmises of that first week came to nothing there's no point in dwelling on them. My story of the Marcia Tillayou mystery is, as a matter of fact, not part of any police record nor is it to be found in the newspaper files.

At the time of Marcia's death there was one who wept more than all the rest, who ranted more, postured more and seemed more humanly objectionable than any of the mourners who carried spears to her funeral. This one was her father, Maurice Tillayou, a Thespian hero of other days, an ancient theatrical windbag with a soul still full of grease paint and obsolete bravado.

Old actors are perhaps the greatest bores in the world, particularly old actors whose day is past and whose very agents no longer carry their telephone numbers in their records. Tillayou was of this tribe, and so much the actor still that he could never seem the man again on the stage or off.

This rubbery-faced son of bombast had had his heyday at the turn of the century. He had strutted his little hour as one of those barrel-voiced, fur-collared, blue-skinned tragedians of whom our fathers, forgetting their names, still mumble with pretended delight.

Unlike many of his generation, old Tillayou had never adjusted himself to the growing realism of the theatre, never tried to soothe his grandiloquent antics to fit the more prosaic tempo of the modern stage. As a result, at fifty, he had almost vanished from the boards; at sixty, he had become one of those myths who cling to

some dimly lighted corner of a theatrical club drinking bitterly to the death of art and the venality of managers.

He who had played all the Great Roles—Hamlet, Lear, Romeo, Jekyll, Monte Cristo, Richelieu, Ben Hur, St. Elmo and Quo Vadis among them—sat in the shadows without a part, as if not he alone but all the swaggering, thundering heroes in whose shoes he had paraded shared his exile. He was given, because of this quaint delusion, to rolling his eyes, working his shaggy brows with mystery and wrapping himself in a peculiar sort of phantom dignity. He spent the day in sonorous complaints against destiny and like all discarded actors was full of an offensive and useless egoism.

There was nonetheless a slightly exciting air about Tillayou, soiled and musty though he was. His wispy gray and yellowish hair rose from his mottled scalp like the whiskers of a cat. He wore an old-fashioned stand-up collar into which he could have retreated turtle fashion had he so desired. His clothes were as ill-fitting as a waiter's or perhaps a philosopher's. His massive face seemed in repose to be folded up and able to open like an accordion. But bore though he was, didactic and misinformed on almost every human topic, his mind as disheveled as his garments, he had about him the charm of authenticity. He seemed more "theatre" than a hundred electric signs. He seemed with his tiresome boasts, his rumbling voice, his pompous mannerisms and overplastic face like some lost puppet playing truant from those theatrical storage houses in which the thousand and one forgotten kingdoms of the stage are stacked away.

During the years I knew him I saw him in harness but three times. A restoration drama revival brought him before the public for a few weeks and once, under the wing of a profit-sharing actors' enterprise, he blossomed briefly and rather foolishly as Richelieu. For, removed from under its bushel, the old Thespian's genius, alas, set no rivers afire. Tillayou emerging from the shadows of exile brought with him all his retinue and was never content with the mere acting of the role on the program. He sought to dazzle as well with a dozen other remarkable characterizations of which he was equally master.

The third time I witnessed his performance was the occasion of the anecdote I've set out to relate.

Marcia Tillayou became a star when she was twenty-five. This means a great deal in the theatre. It is, as a rule, the reward more

of personality than of talent. You must be distinctive and have a new pattern of vocables and gestures to offer. You must have a peculiar voice, it may be inaudible as a conspirator's or incoherent as a train announcer's, but this matters very little providing it has any peculiarity at all—barring adenoids. You must have a set of mannerisms to keep you from being submerged in any characterization, and a certain high-handed way of playing all your parts alike, whatever the dramatist has written or the director demanded.

Marcia had been playing Marcia Tillayou for some eight years, most of them on Broadway, playing this peculiar young lady consistently and with infatuation, when rather abruptly one evening her persistence was rewarded. She had stumbled upon a part even more Marcia Tillayouish than herself—a waspish-tongued, brittle-spirited creature of disillusion invented by Alfred O'Shea—a woman whose green eyes shone with wit and despair, whose gestures were tense with ennui and who, in the play, loved, jested and died like a glass of champagne going stale.

Through the medium of that particular drama which was called *The Forgotten Lady*, audience and critics beheld Marcia Tillayou for the first time as dozens of intimates already knew her, and this enlarged recognition of her personality made her a star. It was a tremendous debut and all who witnessed it knew that ever after, whatever fortunes befell, however many bad plays and adverse criticisms came her way, her stardom was fixed, she would always be one of that handful of women of the stage who are an Electric Sign in fair weather or foul.

Marcia Tillayou's emergence as a star was not the only dramatic event of that evening. There was also Maurice Tillayou's emergence as a father. This happened shortly after the last curtain fell.

There was a reception in Marcia's dressing room. Nobody in the world, except perhaps nursery dolls, receives such concentrated and overwhelming flattery as does an actress on the night of a Great Success. The theatre touches off the facile emotions and its heroes and heroines come in for blasts of adulation which would terrify more realistic souls.

Maurice Tillayou was present at this backstage coronation in Marcia's dressing room. He stood in a corner, a soiled and musty unknown, his eyes glittering at the sight of the make-up boxes, the mirrors, hangings, strewn finery and heaped floral offerings; his ears tingling with the praises showering the head of his daughter.

He lurked silently in the corner until the ecstasies had subsided and the last of the band-wagon soloists drifted out of the room. Then he came forward and, for the first time in the memory of either, kissed his daughter. He pressed her hands. His eyes shone with tears and he added his gift to the triumph of that evening.

"You are a great artist," he said in capitals, "you have taken your place tonight in the great tradition of the stage beside the immortal figures of Rachel, Siddons, Bernhardt and Modjeska. May I have the honor to congratulate you, my child?"

He said this all very glibly and sonorously as was his habit, but in a strange way this pronouncement of her hitherto boring and negligible parent excited Marcia. Regarding the old windbag with her tired but always witty eyes, she felt the deeper meaning of his words. He had come offering her his egoism, that battered, offensive and useless egoism which had sustained and applauded him when all other palms had grown silent. He too had undergone a transformation this night. He was no longer Maurice Tillayou, the star, albeit in temporary eclipse; but old Tillayou, father of a star newly risen. Holding her hands and kissing her, the old gentleman seemed to Marcia to be letting go forever his treasured career and passing on to her, twenty-five years after her birth, some gaudy, hereditary talisman of genius.

The story of Marcia's nine years of stardom is a tale that wants a longer telling than this. It was the career of a high heart in a higher mind. To those who kept pace with her or contributed to her life she seemed as complicated as music by Stravinsky, as troublesome as a handful of fine but broken glass. She owned an acidulous mind and a schoolgirl's heart. She was ironic and disillusioned, yet ineptly romantic. She was always beautiful. Her hair shone as if a light were concealed in her coiffure. Her green eyes were never without comment—amusement, derision. Her skin was pale, her mouth wide and mobile, with restless lips. And, as in women of personality, her face seemed bolder, more strongly modeled than suited her taut, slender body. Her crisp voice was an instrument for wit rather than sighs, and her beauty, despite her reputation, was a thing of which men seldom thought lightly. There was too much character and epigram behind it. Clever people have a way of seeming always gay and this was Marcia's manner—to jest at

scars, her own or others'. Her sprightliness, however, was disconcerting, not only because of the cruelty it contained but for the fact that in her very laughter lurked always the antonym of weariness. She was like one of those fragile chemicals that burn too sharply, giving off a curious and vicious light.

Throughout the nine years of her stardom Maurice Tillayou hovered in the background of her affluence, intrigues and follies. He lived elsewhere but was to be seen often at her dinner table, drinking his wine with a faraway happy stare at the Maestros, Savants, Journalists and Heroes of the Pen and Stage who graced his daughter's board. He was still a musty old dodo but full of punctilio and reticence.

What there could be in common between this ghost of the theatre and the glamorous daughter whom he haunted no one was able to make out, except that she obviously supported him and that he doted on running errands. Marcia's life seemed hardly fit for such continual parental observation, but there he was peering continually from behind his high, stand-up collar at this legendary world of which he had always dreamed. He lingered in the background, saying nothing that anyone heard, through Marcia's hysterical marriage with Alfred O'Shea, author of her first success, *The Forgotten Lady*, and through that scoundrel's subsequent hegira with Reena Kraznoff, the dancer; and through a dozen liaisons and entanglements, all of them full of heartbreak and hysteria. For Marcia was one whose heart clung to illusions that had no place in her bedroom, and who bought her counterfeit pleasures with genuine coin. Like many of the stage she bargained desperately for beauty and took home tinsel.

Old Tillayou was somehow involved in all these unfortunate doings of his daughter. And though Marcia suffered no social blemish from her wanton antics, her father seemed to lose caste, to become a sort of paternal gigolo.

Yet however bedeviled by her wit, reduced by her sins or made the butt of her reminiscences maliciously remembered from childhood, Tillayou remained always charmed by her presence. She treated him as if he were some eccentric toy to which she was playfully attached. Yet this once most touchy of Hamlets seemed immune to her belittlements. He would smile at her sallies and add a bit of trenchant data to her tales and remain, in a way that touched

the hearts of those inclined to notice him at all, respectful and idolatrous. He was, in short, a musty old spectator basking in a corner of his daughter's glamour.

The year and a half which preceded her mysterious death had been a troublesome time for Marcia. A reverberating set-to between herself and Phil Murry, her producer, had resulted in the closing of the play she was in. There had followed a shortsighted jump to a rival producer, a hasty production under his banner and an equally hasty flop. A second appearance under the management of the gifted Morrie Stein had resulted in another failure. And Marcia found herself verging toward that second stage of stardom in which the star, unexpectedly and as if bedeviled by witches, develops play trouble. Still glamorous, still a great box office draw, she floundered through productions that set critical teeth on edge, her colors flying valiantly above a bog of theatrical bilge.

That alchemistic combination which makes for success on Broadway is a tenuous one. Its secret often evaporates, leaving no visible change in the ingredients, except that the gold is gone. And sadly there rises for these stars confronted with empty seats the first bewildering breath of limbo. All this was beginning to happen to Marcia. There was no belittlement of the name Tillayou. It was still an Electric Sign but growing ghostly, slipping, still aglow, into the side streets of fame.

At this time, too, Marcia's finances came in for ill luck. Yet with a falling market and diminishing salary checks, her extravagances continued. Credit took the place of money. To the clamor of friends and lovers on the telephone were added the appeals of tradesmen, dressmakers, bootleggers, landlords and even servants. It was a stormy period and full of those thunders and lightnings with which temperament, thwarted, manages to circle its head as an antidote.

During these months old Tillayou's importance increased. It was he who led the talk in the dressing rooms after each new disastrous first night. He was an encyclopedia of alibis. Where, he wanted to know, had they got such a Leading Man, so horrible and unpracticed a fellow? He had, said Tillayou, ruined the two major scenes. And where, he wanted to know again, had they discovered the Character Woman? How could a play mount with such a bungling amateur hanging on to it? The set, he was quick to point

out, had killed the third act completely. And the rain, he was certain, had depressed the audience. The lighting in the love scene had been atrocious; the director had garbled the first act curtain. But Marcia had been and was always wonderful, superb as ever, giving the best performance he had ever seen any woman offer on the stage. Moreover, he was quick with that final solace—that it was weak plays such as this which made the best vehicles for great stars, that it was in such as these that they personally triumphed.

Papa Tillayou stood at the pass like some valorous Old Guard. He knew, alas, all the thousand and one excuses for failure, all the quaint, smug, fantastic box-office circumlocutions which in the theatre deaden the sting of defeat. And his voice rumbling, his eyes glowing with their best Hamlet fires, he fought these dressing room Thermopylaes, a veteran forsooth.

In the excitement of Marcia Tillayou's murder, Maurice Tillayou lapsed into complete shadowiness. He had been observed at the funeral carrying on like a Comanche, bellowing with grief and collapsing on the wet ground not once but a dozen times. He had ridden back alone to his bailiwick in Washington Square. And here Maurice Tillayou had remained in seclusion while sleuths and journalists played bloodhound through Marcia's life in quest of the villain who had sent three bullets through her heart.

This made fascinating reading and sophisticated dinner-table talk for the Broadway cognoscenti. Theories were as plentiful as jackrabbits in May and as elusive. We who had known Marcia felt the thrill of tragedy and mystery on our doorstep and we spoke guardedly of the matter, for there seemed always present, or closely represented, someone on whom our choicest suspicion was for the moment centered.

Although the police were baffled, God knew and so did some hundreds of New Yorkers who are nearly as omniscient, that there had been material enow in Marcia's life for a whole series of murders. Marcia's career had been interwoven with the careers of equally electric names, names which live in a sort of fidgety half-public undress and seem always but a jump ahead of the thunder-clap of scandal. We waited excitedly for the hand of the law to fall on one of these—for who could have murdered Marcia more logically than one of those who had been part of her life?

First in our suspicion was Alfred O'Shea, who had married her once and who at her death was still legally her husband. This tall,

dark, prankish chevalier, Don Juan, playwright, wit, overcharming and malicious, full of grins, *bon mots* and moody withal as a beggar on a rainy day, was a most obvious suspect to us, his friends. His strong Irish-Castilian face held a jester's nose, pointed and a bit awry, held cold, centered eyes and a gaunt muscular mouth and a promise of high deeds—murder among them. We knew his story well enough. Absurdly infatuated with his Reena, a dancer with a lithographic face and an accent full of charm and faraway places, he had abandoned Marcia and set up a clamor for divorce. Marcia had refused, loathing, she said, to hand him over to so belittling a successor, and we remembered hearing of times this overcharming Celt, drunken and vicious, had broken into Marcia's bedroom threatening to have her heart out unless she released him. What bourgeois trait, what subterranean wiliness inspired Marcia to step so out of character and thwart this man whom she had so desperately loved, I could never make out. She had only jests for answers.

But O'Shea was in a goodly company of suspects, those first weeks of the mystery. There was also Phil Murry, the producer—cool, round-faced, paunchy with a homely chuckle and a little piping voice, all very deceptive qualities, for Mr. Murry was as treacherous as a cocklebur to wrestle with. He was a maestro as famous for his unscrupulousness with women as for his hits.

Marcia had been his mistress until supplanted by Emily Duane, long considered her closest friend. La Duane, an Electric Sign in her own right and a vest-pocket edition of Duse, cello-voiced and full of a deceptive ingénue wholesomeness, had jockeyed Marcia completely out of Murry's life—his theater as well as his arms. We remembered poor Marcia's to-do over Murry's faithlessness, her involved campaign of retaliation—a matter of social ragging and continuous public baiting which had driven that paunchy maestro out of his mind on a number of occasions and reduced Emily to a sort of humorous female Judas in our eyes. How these two had hated Marcia and what vengeance they had sworn against her poor, sad wit!

There was also the grayish, Punchinello-faced Felix Meyer, theatrical lawyer de luxe as he called himself—glib and of the old school as his redundant phrases and ancient cravat testified. This elderly bravo was a species of liaison officer between Broadway and a mysterious world of reality called the Law. But to that world

he found it seldom necessary to resort. For, immersed in the thousand and one secrets of the theatre, his practice was in the main a species of affable blackmail and counter-blackmail—his activities as arbiter, backer, judge and Don Juan being only dimly sensed by his intimates, and not at all by his wife.

His affair with Marcia had been an unusually gritty one, based on her inability to pay him an exorbitant legal fee for services rendered. It had lasted several months and left both of them with a horror of each other. Lawyer Felix went about in terror lest Marcia, out of spite, betray him to his wife, to whose name he had with foolhardy caution transferred all his holdings. And Marcia, aware of his craven fidgets, had time and again promised to do just that. How relieved this glib and accomplished fellow must have felt that first moment reading of her death, and how full of disquiet he must have sat while the bloodhounds scurried through Marcia's life sniffing for clues.

There was also Fritz von Klauber, who had painted Marcia as Pierrette, a dapper gentleman of the arts with a mandarin mustache and a monocle to help him intimidate the less fortunately born theatrical producers (a rather numerous set) for whom he devised unusually expensive scenery. Von Klauber's relations with Marcia had ended more unprettily than most. We knew that he had borrowed thousands of dollars from her while her lover and refused to recognize the debt after discovering or pretending to discover her in the arms of Morrie Stein. Mr. Stein, a purring, monkish Semite with over-red lips, upturned eyes, a grasshopper's body and a prodigious sneer flying, flag like, from his lips, had been Marcia's last substitute for love. We knew little of this adventure, but our suspicions of Morrie were quickened by an aversion which all his intimates seemingly held for him.

There was slightly down on the list of suspects, but still qualifying for our gossip, Percy Locksley, a Pickwickian fellow minus, however, all hint of simplicity or innocence—a journalist with a facetious but blood-curdling cruelty to his style who had figured disturbingly in Marcia's life. He had been rumored as her possible husband, which rumor Marcia had scotched with great public cries of outrage and epigram at Locksley's expense. And though this might seem small motive for murder, to know Locksley was to suspect him of anything, from homicide to genius.

And there was also Emil Wallerstein, the poet, who had

hounded Marcia's doorsill for a year, smitten, drunken, vicious, bawling for her favors and threatening to hang himself with her garter (like Gerard de Nerval) if she refused; who had made quite a show of going to the dogs (at his friends' expense) as a result of her coldness; and whom Marcia, for reasons hidden from us, had thoroughly and always cleverly despised.

Also further down the list was Clyde Veering, a charming, faded roué, once a font of learning and now a fat little Silenus in oxford glasses clinging to a perpetual cocktail. Veering was known amusingly as a connoisseur of decadence. His tasteful bachelor apartment was at the service of his friends of both sexes provided their intentions were sufficiently abnormal or dishonorable. It was a bit difficult to conceive of Veering as a murderer, but like a number of others we held suspect, it was more his possible secret knowledge of the crime than participation in it which excited us.

However, none of these, nor anyone else, came under the hand of the law. There was some surreptitious questioning, a great deal of libel-cautious hints in the news columns, but no arrests. Nothing happened despite the baying of the bloodhounds. A peculiarly gallant reticence seemed to surround Marcia, dead. No letters were found among her effects, no voice from the grave gave direction to the hunt. And the mysterious ending of this charming and famous woman slowly embedded itself behind other local excitements.

It was four weeks after the murder, when its mystery had subsided to an occasional paragraph, that Maurice Tillayou emerged from the shadows and in a spectacular manner.

We who had known Marcia well, or too well, received an invitation from the old gentleman. It was strangely worded. It read: "May I have the honor of your company at a dinner Friday evening which I am giving in memory of my daughter, Marcia? I strongly urge you to attend, for matters vital to yourself as well as to the mystery surrounding my daughter's murder are to be revealed in my house. I am asking you in all fairness to be present—or represented."

A few of us were amused and touched by the old actor's melodramatic summons. But there were almost a score of others whom I found to be filled with disquiet. The matter was guardedly discussed over a number of telephones. Efforts to reach old Tillayou in advance for further information availed nothing.

It rained on that Friday night. Thunder rolled in the sky and the streets were full of that picnic-like confusion which storm brings to the city. I rang the bell of the Tillayou roost and waited in the unfamiliar old hallway until the door was opened by an amazingly senile fellow, stooped, cackling and practically mummified. He was obviously the servant and obviously in a state of complete mental paralysis. For behind him in a large studio-like room, buzzing, clattering, laughing, was as browbeating a coterie of celebrities as the theatre had to offer. They had arrived, and this was odd for these chronic dinner wreckers, on time. I noticed that a number were already on their third cocktail and that the babble which greeted me was completely lacking in those overtones of ennui, disdain and bad manners which usually marked their get-togethers.

I looked vainly for a glimpse of Tillayou and learned from several sources that the old windjammer was still lurking in the wings, building up his entrance. It was a familiar enough group, a rather morbid round-up it seemed, of men and women who had loved Marcia Tillayou, cheated her, quarreled with her, lied to her, drunk with her, amused and betrayed her and been part of that strident, characterless treadmill which is the Broadway Parnassus. So reminiscent were they all of Marcia that she seemed almost present, almost certain to appear and join them, as they stood about maliciously guillotining absent comrades and exchanging those tireless reminiscences which Celebrities always have for each other.

I was rather thrilled at the spectacle, for old Tillayou's intention was plain. He had assembled a company of suspects and was obviously going to climax the evening by some formal accusation of guilt. There was a handful, like myself, who could look forward to no such distinction, but who knew what the old actor had got into his addled head. We had all been part of Marcia's world and we might all be presumed to have had some insight into the mystery that had climaxed her life.

This little world Tillayou had summoned out of its orbit into his humble old actor lodgings made a uniform picture. Its members were as alike as the decorations on a Christmas tree. There was about them an identical air, a similarity of inner and outer tailoring as if they had all been finished off on the same loom. Success was in their names and New York, the New York of the roman-candle signs, of Ballyhoo and Ego, Merry-go-round Achieve-

ment and Overnight-Fortune hung like a tag from their words and manners. They were the cream of a certain electric-lighted firmament—its satraps and its nobles—and if you liked this world you liked them; if you revered this world, as old Tillayou once had, these were gods for your genuflections. A swift and glittering world it was, a bauble of a planet, out of which were hatched nightly the ephemera of art, the fireflies that masqueraded as beacons for an hour.

I joined Veering, always a source of rich information. He was pouting childishly over his fifth cocktail, cackling that he was much too bored by old Tillayou's banality to talk about it and regretting he had wasted an evening, when so few (virile) ones remained. I moved toward Locksley and fell to studying the half-hundred costume photographs of Tillayou in his heyday that decorated the wall.

"He played all the parts," I said. "He could illustrate a full edition of the Bard."

"Yes," said Locksley, "he had that talent for bad acting which made him a natural and tireless Shakesperean."

Von Klauber, joining us, remarked, "Marcia always called him that Old Davil Ham."

"We saw him once as Richelieu," O'Shea said, coming up to us. "I'll never forget Marcia's delight when he went up in his lines in the third act. She said it saved the play."

Wallerstein, the poet, not yet drunk, stood glowering at von Klauber.

"The destruction of your Pierrette painting of Marcia," he veered, "was a great blow to the world of art."

"Thank you," said von Klauber, "I didn't know you had ever had the good fortune to see that painting."

Veering chuckled.

"Marcia always loathed it," he said, winking at everybody. He had, mysteriously, a distaste for artists.

"It was painted under handicaps," said von Klauber calmly.

"Miss Tillayou must have been a very difficult subject."

Lawyer Felix had joined us.

"Not difficult to paint," said von Klauber, "but difficult to please."

"And very ungrateful," Locksley chuckled. "She always secretly

believed that the portrait had been painted with a cake of laundry soap. Or so she said."

Veering stared morosely toward the door of an adjoining room.

"That," he said, "is presumably the old gentleman's lair. Do you think if we applauded violently, he would come out for a bow, at least? I'm slowly perishing of hunger."

The rain rattled on the windows, the thunder rolled, our babble grew tense and nastier with a growing undercurrent of mutiny, a large contingent beginning to murmur of bolting the entire farcical business, and then Tillayou appeared. He was dressed in a combination of evening clothes and a black velvet jacket and looked surprisingly younger. None of us had ever seen or dreamed of so vibrant a Tillayou, or fancied so dominant a figure would crawl out of that old cocoon.

We stopped talking and listened to Tillayou as if the lights had gone out around us and he alone stood in brightness. He had brought a stranger into the room. He introduced this new guest, identifying each of us unctuously by calling and achievement. The guest was Carl Scheuttler which was a name as striking to us at the moment as Sherlock Holmes. Mr. Scheuttler was from the District Attorney's office. He had led the futile hunt for Marcia's murderer and had promised, in the news columns from day to day, "important developments before nightfall." His presence in this room surrounded by this round-up promised definite entertainment. Marcia's murderer was among us, or at least so Tillayou thought, and was going to be served us for dessert.

We started for the dining room, all grown very formal. A long, improvised banquet table was set for us. Tillayou ordered us to find our place cards and under no circumstances change them. Mr. Scheuttler was eying us professionally, at least so it seemed, holding himself aloof from our sallies and making no compromising friendships which might embarrass him when the great moment of accusation and arrest arrived.

As we seated ourselves we noted a number of odd things, which then dropped at least out of my mind because of what happened immediately. Locksley was the first to speak after the chairs had stopped scraping and we were all in our places.

"Who," inquired Locksley feelingly and pointing at the empty chair at the foot of the table, "who is that miserable miscreant?"

From the other end of the table where old Tillayou and his velvet jacket were presiding came a slow sonorous answer.

"That is for my guest of honor, sir."

Locksley reached over and examined the place card.

"Well, well," he chuckled, "this seat has been reserved for one not entirely unknown to all of us."

"Who?" inquired Morrie Stein.

"Marcia Tillayou," said Locksley, "who has gone out for the moment to fetch her harp."

"Serve the dinner, Mr. Harvey," said our host to the old mummy, "we are all here."

Kraznoff, the dancer, who was seated rather near the empty chair, rose nervously.

"Please, I like change my plaze," she announced.

There was laughter.

"Come, come, sit down." Morrie Stein grinned. "Marcia was much too sensible to turn into a ghost."

Locksley was beaming at our host.

"This is marvelous," he said. "Mr. Tillayou, bless his old heart, will turn out the lights and little Marcia will dance for us with a tambourine."

"It's an insult to Marcia," said Emily Duane.

"You're mistaken," von Klauber smiled at her, "the insult is to us. But a very stupid one. So it doesn't matter."

Lawyer Felix, sensing troubled waters, grew oily.

"Perhaps Mr. Tillayou isn't serious," he said. "It may be just a sentimental gesture. You do not really believe she is here, Mr. Tillayou?"

To this Tillayou answered softly, "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

"Very good," said Locksley.

O'Shea, who had been staring sadly at the empty chair, suddenly leaned across the table and addressed it.

"Hello, darling," he said softly. "You look quite stunning to-night. Who gave you those beautiful lilies?"

The thunder rolled outside. Emily Duane gasped. But Locksley, not to be outdone in sallies by thunder or screams, cooed politely.

"Pass the olives, will you, Veering," he said, "before Marcia makes a pig of herself."

There being no olives and since there was no Marcia, this struck us as doubly droll. We laughed. Von Klauber turned his monocle on the "Representative from Scotland Yard."

"Do you believe in ghosts, Mr. Scheuttler?" he asked.

"I'm sure they're out of his jurisdiction," said Veering.

The elderly Mr. Harvey was tottering around the table filling wine glasses. Wallerstein, his dark, angry face intent on the empty chair, announced abruptly:

"Death is not a final word. We do not die so quickly. Marcia was never more alive than she is in this room tonight. Her innermost secrets are at this table. We are a compendium of Marcia."

"That's quite right," said O'Shea moodily. "We all loved her, in our varied fashions."

Tillayou, silent and queerly aglow, repeated under his breath the words, "loved her," and stared around the table, his eyes flooding with tears.

"Now that's rotten taste," Veering murmured, "calling us here to stage an exhibition of table rapping—and tears."

"A little grief over Marcia's death wouldn't be so amiss," said O'Shea, "particularly among her friends."

The aged Mr. Harvey, who, Locksley had been quick to decide, was the famous Santa Fe provisioner, was bringing in soup plates, sparsely filled and almost cold, and clattering them down one at a time in front of the guests. Indignant requests for spoons rising from one end of the table confused him and brought him to a standstill, shivering in his tracks and regarding his master unhappily. Tillayou nodded reassuringly at him, dried his eyes, beamed, pushed his chair from the table and stood up. This unexpected gesture brought quiet. I noticed that Mr. Scheuttler had lowered his head and was frowning severely at the tablecloth.

"I am an old actor," Tillayou began in measured tones, "and with the audience seated and the curtain up, I find it hard to wait."

He favored us with an engaging, almost cringing smile.

"'Art is long but time is fleeting,'" he continued, "and there is one who bids me speak." However, he didn't speak, but fell once more into quotation. It was a poem this time.

"Love, hear thou! How desolate the heart is, ever calling,
Ever unanswered, and the dark rain falling,
Then as now. . . ."

This mystic invocation done with, Tillayou struck a pose that showed the oration itself was about to begin. But how describe such an oration! How bad it was, and how illumined afterwards with a grandeur we never knew was in it. Yet to betray its climax would be somehow to deprive it of the quality belonging to it during its delivery, the bravado with which he spoke it into the sharpened teeth of perhaps the city's most finicky raconteurs, the clownish humors which it achieved unconsciously as it went on, the boredom, the suspense which seemed to promise only the cruel laughter of the audience.

There were, alas, sad lapses of logic in his speech, when the old actor's mind failed to provide the correct transition, ironies which would have seemed far-fetched and inexplicable were they not so obviously borrowed from Marc Antony's funeral address; and there would have been more pauses in it even than there were, had Tillayou not helped himself to the language of the Bard. We heard *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* and *Romeo*, in whispers and inflections that sounded to our kind like rather hilarious caricatures. We listened with distaste, sneers, and apprehension for what might still follow, to Shylock's unctuous tones, and the cries of Spartacus before the Roman populace. Altogether, it was a performance that would have required more than a little indulgence on the part of the politest audience, and one which only O'Shea among us, his head leaning on his hand in one of his idle postures, seemed mysteriously to enjoy.

"You are my guests," it went, "very distinguished guests, and if I offend by what I am going to say, I ask your indulgence as the father of one who was admirable to you. I am the ghost of Banquo come to trouble your feasting.

"These, Mr. Scheuttler, are all very honorable and distinguished citizens who have gone out of their way to gratify the whim of an old actor by supping in his home. They are the great names of that world I have so long served with my humble talents.

"You asked, sirs, if I believed my daughter Marcia was present in this galaxy of her friends. It may be the wandering wits of an old man but I see her there, sitting tragic and beautiful, about her the sound of rain and of sweet bells jangling out of tune. Smiling at those who loved her. Yet she looks with cold eyes at one who sits here, with accusing eyes at one whose heart shouts, 'Avaunt and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!'

"Sweet and fair she was, the brightness of her cheek did shame the stars as daylight doth the lamp. But I won't bore you by asking you to recall those charms you once admired so, those virtues you once held so highly, almost as highly as myself.

"You have not come here tonight to hear a doting father spread his miseries before you, but for sterner business which from your courtesy and attentiveness I feel sure you have guessed.

"Mr. Scheuttler asked me to tell him this matter privately but I refused. For you were all her friends, her honorable friends, and I wanted you present.

"Who killed my daughter? Who took her life? There's the question. I have the answer. But I'll not merely give a name and cry 'murderer!' No, I have the proofs.

"You all loved her and admired her, helped her through the years of struggle, made life sweet for her with your tenderness and understanding and unselfishness. Yet one of you murdered her. Murdered her!

"He is here. He came to my humble house, fancying himself too clever for detection. He sits now at my table. Mr. Harvey, close the doors! Lock them! So he can't escape. Lock us in! The windows, too. Ha—good man, Harvey. He has served me well. He was with me through those years when I too, like my daughter, was a star; not as bright or shining as she. But Maurice Tillayou was a name, sirs, that belonged to the grand days of the theatre. Thank you, Harvey. You may go to bed now and sleep sweetly, and may angels guard thy dreams.

"Where was I, Mr. Scheuttler? Oh, yes, the doors are locked. Is this not like a play? Your faces waiting for the name—the name of Judas. All of you waiting, each edging from his neighbor. I keep my promise, Mr. Scheuttler. I have the proofs, all of them, enough to send that one from this table to the gallows. The man who killed Marcia, who murdered my Marcia, is looking at me. Ah, the terror in his eyes. His name is—"

Thunder had been rolling through the last of his words. Now it crashed outside, drowning out his voice. And at the same time the room in which we sat turned black. The entire scene disappeared as in a dream. The lights had gone out. The women screamed. Chairs toppled over. There was a moment of mysterious confusion, consternation, with cries and even laughter in the dark.

But we were riveted by a voice calling wildly in the black room. It was Tillayou.

"Let me go! He's killing me! Help! Help! Oh, my God! He's killing—killing—"

The voice shut off as if hands were choking its sound. There was a flash of lightning and in the phosphorescent glare that lay in the room for a moment we seemed to see something mad—Tillayou sinking to the floor in a corner, his hands over his heart, and blood flowing over them. The tableau vanished.

An awkward, nightmarish and foolishly restrained commotion followed. We seemed to think it was something unreal we were witnessing and we were not a crowd to scream, to throw down chairs or believe in murder at a lightning glance. Reality is a far cry from those forever writing about it. Emily Duane inquired in a polite voice for lights.

O'Shea was the first to hold a cigarette lighter over the old man in the corner. On his knees, gasping, one hand on the floor and trying to crawl somewhere, we made out Tillayou. In the same moment Mr. Scheuttler, who obviously knew his way about in such dilemmas, was on O'Shea with a flashlight and apparently convinced he was the murderer. Now at last there were screams from the women and a rather hysterical calling for lights from the men and over it all the groans and gasps of a dying man whom Mr. Scheuttler was hounding professionally for a dying statement.

In fact we, Mr. Scheuttler and Tillayou seemed to be acting in a play—one of those Broadway melodramas full of darkness, murder, suspects and all the unconvincing trappings of theatricalized mystery. Some of us lit matches, others cigarette lighters, others searched for lights or joined in hounding the dying man alongside the frantic and barking Mr. Scheuttler. O'Shea provided a minute's extra excitement by kicking in the door and reappearing in the face of Mr. Scheuttler's drawn gun, this official having forbidden anyone to leave the premises, with a candelabra. This he lit and the candelabra illumined with its mellow beam a scene that seemed as operatic as *Tosca*.

"It's dark," Old Tillayou was moaning. "Marcia, where are you? My little bright-haired girl. Marcia, my child."

Now we all leaned over him, urging him, like a mob of earnest supers, to tell who had killed him, and eying each other the while askance. Mr. Scheuttler, in particular, convinced that the old man

was about to name his murderer, waited with his gun still drawn.

But the old actor was raving.

"Blood," he said, lifting his hands and staring at them. "My blood." And again asked to speak out, he started crying for Marcia. "Listen," he said, "listen to her. Ever calling . . . ever unanswered." There was more of it, heartbreaking and somehow unreal.

Then there was the awful moment when the old man seemed to search for someone. Now his eyes were calm. He recognized Mr. Scheuttler.

"Let me whisper the name," he murmured eagerly, and so faintly we could hardly hear. "He—he mustn't escape. Closer, my friends. Lend me your ears. . . ."

"Who was it?" someone couldn't help saying desperately.

Mr. Scheuttler roared for quiet, only to repeat the question himself in the next moment.

"Ah," said Tillayou, "it was . . . it was . . ." and lapsed into a silence. There was a babble of questioning as the silence grew prolonged, and then hysterical. Mr. Scheuttler no longer seemed to be watching his suspects. He was looking at the old man who appeared to be quietly crying. Some tears rolled down his cheeks. And then an incredible thing happened. Tillayou died.

There had been some coughing, the rattle that is so unmistakable even to those who have never heard it. But no one somehow had expected death.

An even more melodramatic pandemonium followed Tillayou's passing. Police were called for. We were ordered about. Mr. Scheuttler flourished his gun. Mr. Harvey was sent for from his sleep guarded by angels and, as he stood moaning over his master's body, questioned about the switch for the lights which hadn't worked all this time. O'Shea took a lead in this questioning, despite Mr. Scheuttler's violent orders addressed to one whom he now regarded firmly as a murderer. Mr. Harvey was incapable of any answers but O'Shea suddenly went down on his hands and knees and began crawling under the table while Mr. Scheuttler, fancying this an effort to escape, threatened loudly he would never get out of the room alive. But suddenly, in the midst of these threats, as O'Shea fumbled under the carpet at the table's edge, the lights went on.

"If you will allow me to be a bit oracular and put that gun away," O'Shea said, poking his head up from under the table,

"the mystery is a very simple one. Tillayou turned out the lights himself. The switch was right under his foot. And then he killed himself."

It was dawn when Locksley, O'Shea and I entered O'Shea's rooms. We had spent an active and rather noisy evening as guests of Mr. Scheuttler and two police officials. Mr. Harvey had finally told his story. Tillayou had had the switch under the table installed the day before and this vital clue had been quickly verified from the electricians who had done the work. Mr. Harvey related that Tillayou had ordered him not to cook any food for our banquet, saying it wouldn't be necessary, and had also said that dishes and silverware would not be needed at his dinner. The absence of these items had been one of the odd things we noticed when we had first entered the dining room. Mr. Harvey also identified the dagger removed from Tillayou's body as one that had seen service in an ancient production of *Macbeth* and one which his master had spent the hours before the arrival of his guests sharpening in his bedroom.

There was no doubt that Tillayou had killed himself. But Mr. Scheuttler and the two police officials remained confused by the manner of his suicide. O'Shea persuaded them, aided by Mr. Harvey's tears and tattle, that the old actor's mind had been unhinged by grief over Marcia's death, and that the whole matter could be explained only by the poor man's insanity. We were all allowed finally to go, after assuring the officials we would appear any time they desired us for further questioning.

In O'Shea's rooms, Locksley and I waited patiently while that moody Celt opened bottles and prepared us drinks. After he had accomplished these rites he went to a drawer in a desk.

"I'll let you read this letter," he said. "It's from Marcia. It was mailed the night she was found dead."

He handed us a scrawled piece of note paper. We read:

Alfred, I'm bored, tired, hurt, sick, full of nasty things. You were always the nicest. So take care of my father, like a good boy, will you? I'd stay a while longer but death seems easier and simpler than life. What are a few pills more or less to one who has swallowed so much? Good-by and do you remember the first night of *The Forgotten Lady*? For the last time,

MARCIA

O'Shea smiled at us moodily as we finished.

"That's the truth," he said. "She committed suicide."

"What about the bullets?" I asked.

"Guess," said O'Shea.

"Tillayou," said Locksley.

"Right," said O'Shea. "He found her dead with the poison still in her hand, very likely. And he couldn't bear that."

"I hate to think of it, too," said Locksley.

"He worshiped her," said O'Shea. "She was his star. But stars don't commit suicide. Only failures do that. Only very miserable and defeated people do that. He tried to keep her a star. So he set about slashing the painting and wrecking the place. It was all done very bravely so that the world might never guess that Marcia had died so ingloriously.

"At least," said O'Shea, "that's what I thought it was at first. And I decided to say nothing. What we saw tonight has got me all excited." He smiled and drank again.

"It was terrible," said Locksley.

"It was marvelous." O'Shea grinned at him. His gaunt, muscular mouth trembled with the mood of eloquence. "I read the signs wrong," he said. "Do you know what happened?"

"No," said Locksley, "except that the old boy was madder than a Hatter, poor soul."

"He wasn't mad," said O'Shea, "he was sane. You see, my lads, the old polliwog never thought of Marcia as having killed herself. He found her dead by her own hand. But that didn't mean anything. He saw her as murdered—by all of us. Murdered, gadzooks, by all the lying, cheating, faking rabble of friends that had danced around her including your humble servant, Alfred O'Shea. We'd killed her," he said dourly. "Do you remember what he called us—all honorable and distinguished friends, all full of sweetness and unselfishness toward her? That was cute of the old windbag. Looking at us whom he hated so and rolling those juicy sentences at us. We were a flock of vampires that had fed off her. That's how he saw us, all of us. When he found her dead he thought of her as murdered, by us, by Broadway. It was all our hands that had lifted the poison glass to her mouth. And he went cracked with the curious idea of somehow bringing all these phantom murderers to justice."

We nodded. O'Shea drank again.

"That was a great performance tonight at the table," he said. "And a cold house. But he went over big."

"What made you think of another switch?" I asked.

"I knew that something strange was on the boards," O'Shea grinned. "I wanted to interrupt. But I hated to break up his show, whatever it was going to be. I'm kind of glad I didn't, aren't you?"

We said we were, but looked blandly at our host for further explanation. O'Shea drank again, grinned, his eyes filling with admiration.

"Do you realize," he said softly, "that the old barnstormer was playing his death scene from the moment he came into the room, with Sherlock Holmes in tow? He had the dagger in his pocket. He'd figured it out, rehearsed it in his bedroom for days, sharpening away at Macbeth's old toad stabber. He had his lines down pat. He'd planned to kill himself with the name of the supposedly guilty party almost on his lips. He was going to go as far as saying who it was that had murdered Marcia and then, out with the lights and the dagger in his heart. Suspicion would be turned on all of us. We'd all of us be clapped into jail and raked over the coals, not for his murder alone, but for Marcia's. That was the main thing. Whoever had killed Marcia had snapped out the lights and done him in, just as he was about to reveal the name. That was the plot. What a grand old boy! I'll never forget his dying."

"Nor I," I agreed.

"Dying and remembering his lines to the last," said O'Shea. "What a memory. That was my favorite poem he kept quoting—*Rain on Rahoun*, by Joyce. He heard me recite it once—on my honeymoon. You remember when he lay in the corner with the knife in him—acting, by God. All that waiting and mumbling about Marcia—do you know what he was doing? Ad libbing, like the good old trouper he was, filling in because death had missed its cue. Lend me your ears—it was the grand manner—grease paint and blood. And do you remember how he gurgled finally in that old ham voice of his—'It was . . . it was . . .' and died exactly at the right moment? What timing!"

"I remember how he said good-by to Mr. Harvey," said Locksley, "that was pretty."

We sat silent, overcome by the memory of old Tillayou's oration, hearing it anew with the mystery out of it.

"None of us will die as gallantly," said O'Shea, "and so much in the full sanctity of love—and art."

Locksley rose and shivered. A wry smile came into his Pickwickian face.

"A lovely piece of old-fashioned miming," he said, "but as fruitless a drama as I ever had the misfortune to witness."

"You're right," O'Shea said, "the plot was full of holes. I could have helped him a lot with the construction. But—it was a great Last Night."

ENCOURAGEMENT



Mark Hellinger

A NEW musical comedy was scheduled to go into rehearsal. The producer, a man whose ideas differ vastly from those of other producers, was looking for talent. His idea was—and still is, I imagine—that talent should be discovered rather than bought. He dislikes dealing with established stars and feels he is better off developing new stars of his own. He's perfectly right, too. The only trouble with the idea is that he can't find the proper talent. Which is rather an important detail.

However, this producer dropped into a motion picture theatre one afternoon. He leaned back drowsily as the prologue to the feature was presented.

It was the usual thing. A huge orchestra. Some dreary dancers and an ensemble that howled for all it was worth, which wasn't much. A master of ceremonies, trying his best to be funny and succeeding only in being exceptionally dull. Then a specialty or two.

Suddenly the producer leaned forward. A kid was on the stage—a good-looking kid who played the banjo. For some forty seconds, this boy ran his fingers over the banjo with lightning-like rapidity.

Just one chorus and he was through. The crowd applauded heartily.

The producer arose and went backstage. A few minutes later, he was being introduced to Joe, the kid with the banjo. . . .

After a few minutes of conversation, the producer suddenly popped the question.

"Joe," he said affably, "how would you like to go into my new show?"

The boy's eyes opened wide with delight.

"Gee, Mr. S.," he responded, "that certainly is something I've dreamed about for a long time. I'd love to be with you, sir. And I know I'll make good if you'll only give me the chance."

The producer nodded.

"You'll get the chance, Joe," he asserted. "I'll have a lot of things for you in this show. Drop into my office tomorrow morning. Good night."

The producer departed. And that night the kid named Joe tumbled into bed and smiled peacefully through sweet dreams of his name in big, flashing, powerful electric lights. . . .

The next morning found Joe in the producer's office at an early hour. It didn't take them long to come to terms. For, no matter what terms the producer offered, it was a term to the right for Joe.

Joe was to come to the first rehearsal the week following. He left the office. And the producer looked over his scripts and called in his authors.

"Boys," he said, "I have the find of the season. He's a young boy—but he's handsome and likable. I'm going to spot him all through the show. He's really excellent. Just wait and you'll see. Meanwhile, I want some special numbers for him. Something like this . . ."

And he talked on and on and on. . . .

Some three weeks passed. Rehearsals of the new show were in full swing. The producer had made good on his word to Joe. The handsome kid and his banjo specialty were standing out through the entire show.

Everybody in the company liked the boy. He seemed so unaffected. So fresh. So un-Broadwayish. And so enthusiastic.

Sadly enough, though, the boy was not doing as well as the

producer had imagined. He played his banjo well enough. But when it came to doing four or five numbers through the same show, there was too much sameness in his routine.

The authors of the piece sat in at rehearsals. When Joe came on they shook their heads sadly.

"A nice boy," they told the producer, "but not strong enough to be spotted the way you've done. Cut him down. Cut him down."

The producer hated to do it. He liked the boy so much. But he realized regretfully that he had been a trifle too enthusiastic. The boy, of course, was still good. But there was evidently something lacking.

So one of his numbers was taken away. Then another was cut. Then another. Finally there was nothing left but his original banjo specialty.

With each cut Joe felt the situation more and more keenly. This was his first opportunity, his first glorious chance. Why were they doing this to him? He wanted to ask someone, anyone. But there was none to whom he could turn. . . .

The show was about to open out of town. It was running too long. So the producer called a consultation of his staff and questioned them on what should be cut from the show.

One of them spoke up. And he echoed the sentiments of the rest.

"We all like this fellow Joe," he said. "He's a nice fellow—a sweet guy—and all that. But he doesn't mean a thing. I think, since we must cut, that he ought to be the first to go."

The producer shook his head.

"After all, boys," was his response, "there must be something in this business besides cold cash. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's the way I feel.

"You see, I picked this boy out of nowhere. He has looked up to me as though I were a god. I've watched his face as we took his numbers away one by one. It hurt me ~~damned near~~ ^{almost as} much as it hurt him. I can't fire that kid right now. I just can't do it.

"We'll take him out of town with us. I'll take that one number away from him and give him a little comedy bit to fill in. We'll tell him to stick around and wait.

"I don't want to hurt him any more than I have to, boys. I'm sorry. But I'm just that kind of a guy."

The show left New York and went to a nearby city in preparation for its opening. Joe went along. But he was not the same Joe that first went to rehearsals with a buoyant step and a boyish happiness.

His eyes had grown harder. His lips were set in a thinner line. He was learning his Broadway. . . .

On the day the show was scheduled for its out-of-town opening, the producer went to his protégé.

"Joe," he said. "We're going to try and find a spot for you tonight if we possibly can. Your specialty number is out for the time being because the show runs so terribly long. But we may put it back any moment. So stick close backstage all the time.

"Meanwhile, we have something else for you. Three times during the show, you're to take your banjo out, grab a chair and commence to play the 'Rhapsody in Blue.' After you've played the first few bars, the stage manager will shout 'Okay, Eddie'—and you walk off the stage. Get it?"

"It's a comedy part. You'll get plenty of laughs with it. Of course—the way it looks as I outline it to you—it's only to fill in stage waits. But it means more than that, Joe. Much more. And while you're doing that, I'll try to find some spot for your specialty."

"All right, Boss," Joe responded. "Whatever you do is fair enough for me. I'll get plenty of laughs with that funny bit. Thanks."

But he turned away in a hurry. . . .

Eight-fifteen found Joe fully dressed in the tuxedo he had purchased expressly for the opening. The stage manager walked by and looked at him.

"Those aren't clothes for a comedy bit, Joe," he suggested. "Run upstairs and get a coupla laughs into your make-up. Keep the top business on, but put a pair of golf knickers over your pants and dig up a pair of big shoes from somewhere. You're supposed to be funny, boy. Funny. Like this. Ha-ha! Funny. Get me?"

Joe looked at him.

"But how," he murmured brokenly, "how about my specialty?"

The stage manager grinned.

"Oh, sure," he answered. "We'll take care of that. But first get funny." . . .

At nine o'clock, Joe made his first entrance. As he stepped upon the stage, the audience laughed at his eccentric make-up. The laugh struck terror to his heart. But he sat himself in a chair, placed his beloved banjo on his lap and began to play.

A few seconds later came the cry, "Okay, Eddie." Joe looked into the wings, stopped abruptly, grabbed his chair and ran off. The audience laughed. It was, they felt, a novel way to fill a stage wait.

Later in the evening, Joe did the same thing over again. Still later, he went through the same gesture. Each time, the audience laughed a bit louder. The third time they actually applauded a bit.

But no one said a word about his specialty. All through the show, he waited for someone to tell him it was time for his big number.

But no one ever came. . . .

The second night came and went. Again there was no specialty. Just those same few bars, that monotonous "Okay, Eddie"—and off. He wasn't waiting around for that specialty so long now. Perhaps he knew it was never coming.

On the third night, as he came off from his first stage wait, the producer passed. Joe reached out and touched his arm.

"I don't want to bother you, sir," he said. "I know you're very busy. But I was just wondering if my specialty—if you intended—if you thought—"

The producer stopped.

"No, Joe," he answered kindly. "It's not going in. I'm sorry. The show's a little too long as it is. Maybe in New York . . ."

Joe bit his lip. He stood there, his head low. For some fifteen minutes, he acted as though he were in a trance. Finally the stage manager nudged him.

"Get out there, Joe," he cried. "It's time for another of your big hits."

The boy straightened up. He picked up his banjo with a snap and strolled out upon the stage. The audience laughed. He began the "Rhapsody in Blue." A few seconds went by and the audience heard the familiar cry.

"Okay, Eddie," were the words.

But this time the boy failed to arise. Instead his fingers flashed across the instrument with even greater rapidity than before.

The cry became more insistent.

"Okay, Eddie," shouted the stage manager. "Okay, Eddie."

Joe never stopped for an instant.

"Say it again," he breathed as he played on and on. "Say it again. And again. And again. I hate you all. Say it again, I tell you. Say it again."

Consternation reigned backstage. But that boy played on and on. He played that marvelous number as though his very soul were part and parcel of it. He saw nothing. He cared for nothing. He played then as he had never played before.

At the final note, the audience went wild. They cheered and applauded. He had stirred them mightily. But he seemed to care nothing for the applause. Looking neither to the right, nor the left, he walked rapidly from the stage.

The company made way for him as he strolled off to the stage door. Reaching there, he turned and saw the stage manager immediately behind him. Then he smiled.

"I know what you're going to say," he shouted. "You're going to say that I held up your show and that I'm no good. All right. Maybe I know it. This is my good-bye to all of you. I'm through."

Lifting the banjo, he hurled it with all his force at the stone wall. Swishing through the air, it landed—and broke into a hundred pieces.

Joe turned, walked through the door, up the street and disappeared. . . .

That company never saw Joe again. He never returned for any of his clothes. He never asked for any salary. To this day, the producer hasn't the slightest idea what became of the boy.

But, after all, who was there to care what became of him? No one, really. Except, perhaps, Joe. . . .

THE FURNISHED ROOM



O. Henry

RESTLESS, shifting, fugacious as time itself is a certain vast bulk of the population of the red brick district of the lower West Side. Homeless, they have a hundred homes. They flit from furnished room to furnished room, transients forever—transients in abode, transients in heart and mind. They sing "Home, Sweet Home" in ragtime; they carry their *lares et penates* in a bandbox; their vine is entwined about a picture hat; a rubber plant is their fig tree.

Hence the houses of this district, having had a thousand dwellers, should have a thousand tales to tell, mostly dull ones, no doubt; but it would be strange if there could not be found a ghost or two in the wake of all these vagrant guests.

One evening after dark a young man prowled among these crumbling red mansions, ringing their bells. At the twelfth he rested his lean hand-baggage upon the step and wiped the dust from his hatband and forehead. The bell sounded faint and far away in some remote, hollow depths.

To the door of this, the twelfth house whose bell he had rung, came a housekeeper who made him think of an unwholesome, surfeited worm that had eaten its nut to a hollow shell and now sought to fill the vacancy with edible lodgers.

He asked if there was a room to let.

"Come in," said the housekeeper. Her voice came from her throat; her throat seemed lined with fur. "I have the third-floor-back, vacant since a week back. Should you wish to look at it?"

The young man followed her up the stairs. A faint light from no particular source mitigated the shadows of the halls. They trod noiselessly upon a stair carpet that its own loom would have

forsworn. It seemed to have become vegetable; to have degenerated in that rank, sunless air to lush lichen or spreading moss that grew in patches to the staircase and was viscid under the foot like organic matter. At each turn of the stairs were vacant niches in the wall. Perhaps plants had once been set within them. If so they had died in that foul and tainted air. It may be that statues of the saints had stood there, but it was not difficult to conceive that imps and devils had dragged them forth in the darkness and down to the unholy depths of some furnished pit below.

"This is the room," said the housekeeper, from her furry throat. "It's a nice room. It ain't often vacant. I had some most elegant people in it last summer—no trouble at all, and paid in advance to the minute. The water's at the end of the hall. Sprowls and Mooney kept it three months. They done a vaudeville sketch. Miss B'retta Sprowls—you may have heard of her—oh, that was just the stage names—right there over the dresser is where the marriage certificate hung, framed. The gas is here, and you see there is plenty of closet room. It's a room everybody likes. It never stays idle long."

"Do you have many theatrical people rooming here?" asked the young man.

"They comes and goes. A good proportion of my lodgers is connected with the theatres. Yes, sir, this is the theatrical district. Actor people never stays long anywhere. I get my share. Yes, they comes and they goes."

He engaged the room, paying for a week in advance. He was tired, he said, and would take possession at once. He counted out the money. The room had been made ready, she said, even to towels and water. As the housekeeper moved away he put, for the thousandth time, the question that he carried at the end of his tongue.

"A young girl—Miss Vashner—Miss Eloise Vashner—do you remember such a one among your lodgers? She would be singing on the stage, most likely. A fair girl, of medium height and slender, with reddish-gold hair and dark mole near her left eyebrow."

"No, I don't remember the name. Them stage people has names they change as often as their rooms. They comes and they goes. No, I don't call that one to mind."

No. Always no. Five months of ceaseless interrogation and the inevitable negative. So much time spent by day in questioning

managers, agents, schools and choruses; by night among the audiences of theatres from all-star casts down to music halls so low that he dreaded to find what he most hoped for. He who had loved her best had tried to find her. He was sure that since her disappearance from home this great, water-girt city held her somewhere, but it was like a monstrous quicksand, shifting its particles constantly, with no foundation, its upper granules of today buried tomorrow in ooze and slime.

The furnished room received its latest guest with a first glow of pseudo-hospitality, a hectic, haggard, perfunctory welcome like the specious smile of a demirep. The sophisticated comfort came in reflected gleams from the decayed furniture, the ragged brocade upholstery of a couch and two chairs, a foot-wide cheap pier glass between the two windows, from one or two gilt picture frames and a brass bedstead in a corner.

The guest reclined, inert, upon a chair, while the room, confused in speech as though it were an apartment in Babel, tried to discourse to him of its divers tenantry.

A polychromatic rug like some brilliant-flowered rectangular, tropical islet lay surrounded by a billowy sea of soiled matting. Upon the gay-papered wall were those pictures that pursue the homeless one from house to house—The Huguenot Lovers, The First Quarrel, The Wedding Breakfast, Psyche at the Fountain. The mantel's chastely severe outline was ingloriously veiled behind some pert drapery drawn rakishly askew like the sashes of the Amazonian ballet. Upon it was some desolate flotsam cast aside by the room's marooned when a lucky sail had borne them to a fresh port—a trifling vase or two, pictures of actresses, a medicine bottle, some stray cards out of a deck.

One by one, as the characters of a cryptograph became explicit, the little signs left by the furnished room's procession of guests developed a significance. The threadbare space in the rug in front of the dresser told that lovely women had marched in the throng. The tiny fingerprints on the wall spoke of little prisoners trying to feel their way to sun and air. A splattered stain, raying like the shadow of a bursting bomb, witnessed where a hurled glass or bottle had splintered with its contents against the wall. Across the pier glass had been scrawled with a diamond in staggering letters the name "Marie." It seemed that the succession of dwellers in the furnished room had turned in fury—perhaps tempted beyond

forebearance by its garish coldness—and wreaked upon it their passions. The furniture was chipped and bruised; the couch, distorted by bursting springs, seemed a horrible monster that had been slain during the stress of some grotesque convulsion. Some more potent upheaval had cloven a great slice from the marble mantel. Each plank in the floor owned its particular cant and shriek as from a separate and individual agony. It seemed incredible that all this malice and injury had been wrought upon the room by those who had called it for a time their home; and yet it may have been the cheated home instinct surviving blindly, the resentful rage at false household gods that had kindled their wrath. A hut that is our own we can sweep and adorn and cherish.

The young tenant in the chair allowed these thoughts to file, soft-shod, through his mind, while there drifted into the room furnished sounds and furnished scents. He heard in one room a tittering and incontinent, slack laughter; in others the monologue of a scold, the rattling of dice, a lullaby, and one crying dully; above him a banjo tinkled with spirit. Doors banged somewhere; the elevated trains roared intermittently; a cat yowled miserably upon a back fence. And he breathed the breath of the house—a dank savor rather than a smell—a cold, musty effluvium as from underground vaults mingled with the reeking exhalations of linoleum and mildewed and rotten woodwork.

Then suddenly, as he rested there, the room was filled with the strong, sweet odor of mignonette. It came as upon a single buffet of wind with such sureness and fragrance and emphasis that it almost seemed a living visitant. And the man cried aloud: "What, dear?" as if he had been called, and sprang up and faced about. The rich odor clung to him and wrapped him around. He reached out his arms for it, all his senses for the time confused and comingled. How could one be peremptorily called by an odor? Surely it must have been a sound. But, was it not the sound that had touched, that had caressed him?

"She has been in this room," he cried, and he sprang to wrest from it a token, for he knew he would recognize the smallest thing that had belonged to her or that she had touched. This enveloping scent of mignonette, the odor that she had loved and made her own—whence came it?

The room had been but carelessly set in order. Scattered upon

the flimsy dresser scarf were half a dozen hairpins—those discreet, indistinguishable friends of womankind, feminine of gender, infinite of mood and uncommunicative of tense. These he ignored, conscious of their triumphant lack of identity. Ransacking the drawers of the dresser he came upon a discarded, tiny, ragged handkerchief. He pressed it to his face. It was racy and insolent with heliotrope; he hurled it to the floor. In another drawer he found odd buttons, a theatre program, a pawnbroker's card, two lost marshmallows, a book on the divination of dreams. In the last was a woman's black satin hairbow, which halted him, poised between ice and fire. But the black satin hairbow also is femininity's demure, impersonal common ornament and tells no tales.

And then he traversed the room like a hound on the scent, skimming the walls, considering the corners of the bulging matting on his hands and knees, rummaging mantel and tables, the curtains and hangings, the drunken cabinet in the corner, for a visible sign, unable to perceive that she was there beside, around, against, within, above him, clinging to him, wooing him, calling him so poignantly through the finer senses that even his grosser ones became cognizant of the call. Once again he answered loudly: "Yes, dear!" and turned, wild-eyed, to gaze on vacancy, for he could not yet discern form and color and love and outstretched arms in the odor of mignonette. Oh, God! whence that odor, and since when have odors had a voice to call? Thus he groped.

He burrowed in crevices and corners, and found corks and cigarettes. These he passed in passive contempt. But once he found in a fold of the matting a half-smoked cigar, and this he ground beneath his heel with a green and trenchant oath. He sifted the room from end to end. He found dreary and ignoble small records of many a peripatetic tenant; but of her whom he sought, and who may have lodged there, and whose spirit seemed to hover there, he found no trace.

And then he thought of the housekeeper.

He ran from the haunted room downstairs and to a door that showed a crack of light. She came out to his knock. He smothered his excitement as best he could.

"Will you tell me, madam," he besought her, "who occupied the room I have before I came?"

"Yes, sir. I can tell you again. 'Twas Sprowls and Mooney, as I

said. Miss B'retta Sprowls it was in the theatres, but Missis Mooney she was. My house is well known for respectability. The marriage certificate hung, framed, on a nail over—"

"What kind of a lady was Miss Sprowls—in looks, I mean?"

"Why, black-haired, sir, short, and stout, with a comical face. They left a week ago Tuesday."

"And before they occupied it?"

"Why, there was a single gentleman connected with the draying business. He left owing me a week. Before him was Missis Crowder and her two children, that stayed four months; and back of them was old Mr. Doyle, whose sons paid for him. He kept the room six months. That goes back a year, sir, and further I do not remember."

He thanked her and crept back to his room. The room was dead. The essence that had vivified it was gone. The perfume of mignonette had departed. In its place was the old, stale odor of moldy house furniture, of atmosphere in storage.

The ebbing of his hope drained his faith. He sat staring at the yellow, singing gaslight. Soon he walked to the bed and began to tear the sheets into strips. With the blade of his knife he drove them tightly into every crevice around windows and door. When all was snug and taut he turned out the light, turned the gas full on again and laid himself gratefully upon the bed.

It was Mrs. McCool's night to go with the can for beer. So she fetched it and sat with Mrs. Purdy in one of those subterranean retreats where housekeepers foregather and the worm dieth seldom.

"I rented out my third-floor-back this evening," said Mrs. Purdy, across a fine circle of foam. "A young man took it. He went up to bed two hours ago."

"Now, did ye, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am?" said Mrs. McCool, with intense admiration. "You do be a wonder for rentin' rooms of that kind. And did ye tell him, then?" she concluded in a husky whisper laden with mystery.

"Rooms," said Mrs. Purdy, in her furriest tones, "are furnished for to rent. I did not tell him, Mrs. McCool."

"'Tis right ye are, ma'am; 'tis by renting rooms we kape alive. Ye have the rale sense for business, ma'am. There be many people

will rayjict the rentin' of a room if they be tould a suicide has been after dyin' in the bed of it."

"As you say, we has our living to be making," remarked Mrs. Purdy.

"Yis, ma'am; 'tis true. 'Tis just one wake ago this day I helped ye lay out the third-floor-back. A pretty slip of a colleen she was to be killin' herself wid the gas—a swate little face she had, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am."

"She'd a-been called handsome, as you say," said Mrs. Purdy, assenting but critical, "but for that mole she had a-growin' by her left eyebrow. Do fill up your glass again, Mrs. McCool."

GOOD-BY TO PALSHIP



Arthur Kober

I DROPPED in at The Roost ("Crow With the Hollywood Stars") to pick up a script I had left there the night before. I was surprised to see Benny Greenspan standing at the bar. Benny, you know, is no lush.

"Hi, Benny," I said. "What're you doing here when you ought to be flesh-peddling at the studios? Fine service you're giving your clients!"

"Artie," he said dolefully, and I could tell by his red-rimmed eyes he was slightly fried, "so long as you've known me, you know I'm no bar rag. And yet a human bein' can stand so much and no further."

He insisted on my having a drink, and we took our glasses to one of the booths and sat down. He threw a fistful of potato chips into his mouth and drowned them with a generous slug of Scotch.

"This stuff is simply perzin to me." He winced and corrugated his forehead. "How my system can stand it is beyond me."

"What's up?" I asked. He was going to tell anyhow.

"Look." He tapped the copper-covered table momentarily. "A relationship of over fifteen years' standin' is broken up. Like this." He snapped his fingers. "Over fifteen years Eli Leonard and me was like this." He placed one finger over the other. "Like brothers. And now—good-by to palship! It's over—finished!" He drew a long sigh. "I guess it was written on ice."

I was beginning to understand. "So it was you and Leonard *Chatter* meant this morning! I saw the item about a producer and his buddy almost coming to blows last night."

"He was more than my buddy," said Benny, his eyes beginning to water. "He was my pal. What I done fa him—! Aaah, what's a use of revivin' what's past and forgotten? Oney there was a time when he was a liability to the industry. And I felt so sorry on account of Gussie Leonard and the kids, I went over to see R.D. at Unity and I says to R.D., 'Howz about givin' Eli Leonard a break?' and R.D. says to me, 'Eli's washed up. He's got nothin' but a negative attitood and I don't like to surround myself with negative attitoods.' And, Artie, I hadda argue myself hoarse tryin' to sell R.D. a bill of goods on Eli. 'Give him a break,' I says, 'and he'll stop lookin' on the unpolished side of things and he'll develop a positive attitood you're gonna be mighty proud of.' It took me hours, but I finery got him set at Unity. Aw right, his pickchas ain't sensational but they ain't strickly stinkolas. And his salry—fomm a spit and a cuppa cawfee I developed it to four figgers. You hear? Four figgers he's gettin' today, and that ain't flypaper!"

"Listen. I don't know if you remember the stories in the papers about me romancin' Maxine Maurine. All fakes—lies! I never even laid a little finger on Maxine. I was oney the stooge in the matter—the cover-up to proteck Eli on account if Gussie ever found out, good night! Gussie is sweet, but has she got a temper! It flares up like wild flower! So everytime Eli wanted to go dancin' or to the hot spots, I hadda be dragged along so people will think Maxine's my girl, not Eli's. I had no life I could call my own. I remember one cute article, she was real cute, and I wanted to pass an evenin' with her, and she says, 'No, thank you. I'm all dated up.' So I finery says to her, 'What's the idear?' and she says, 'I just happen not to want to play second fiddle to Maxine Maurine.' I should tell her Maxine is Eli's friend!"

I ordered a Scotch-and-soda for me and a straight Scotch and another bowl of potato chips for Benny.

"About last night," I began.

"That's what I'm comin' to," said Benny. "A coupla weeks ago a little number comes to my awfice and right away I deteck by her looks she got talent. Eyes big like marbles, and a form— Well, I seen many a nice article in my time, but this number, she's a real ragin' beaudy! Dixie Hall is her name. She's fomm the South— Dixie, you know—and she speaks with a very cute southern brogue. So I tells Dixie I got faith in her so much I'm gonna handle her personally, myself. 'Honey,' I says to her, 'the first thing is to take you to the night spots where the producers go. When they see you, their curiosity will say to them, 'I wonder who that new find sittin' with Benny is,' and tomorra they'll call me up to make terms. See if I'm not right!'

"And I woulda been right, too, oney it happens on that night none of the boys were around. So I finey says to Dixie, 'How 'bout comin' to my place to talk over terms, supposin' a contrack comes our way?' So she is agreeable and she comes to my place. I guess I musta had a drink too many, but I find out one thing, and that is this Dixie, she's no tramp. I admire a type girl like that. She lays her cards right on the line and she says, 'I'm sorry, but I just happen not to mix business with pleasure. So long my mind is occupied on gettin' a job, it's strickly business with me. I guess I have how you call a one-track mind, but that's the way it is.'

"I can see it's up to me to get her set some place because it's a shame to see a number with her personality and talent go to waste.

"Yesterday mornin' I'm wrecking my brain to figger where the ideal spot would be to place Dixie, when who should call me up except Eli. He says Gussie is takin' the kids to Palm Springs; what am I doin' about suppa? So I do some quick thinkin' and I says I got a date with a certain number we can shake after we eat. Besides, I tells him, I am anxious he should meet this pardy on account I am very inarrested in her. I mean, in furtherin' her individually, as well as her career.

"So I brings Dixie to Eli's house fa suppa, and he takes a hinge at her and I wait fa his reaction, and the oney reaction he gimme is a dead pan. I guess maybe she's too serious fa him. Eli's type is some tramp who looks like a neon electric light and, nachelly, Dixie looks far fomm a neon electric light. After we eat I gives her the awfice and she says, 'Excuse me, I gotta go to the ladies' room to powder my nose.'

"When she leaves I says to Eli, 'Looka here, Eli, there goes a genuwine talent whom you should snatch up fa your studio stock company over at Unity.' And he tells me that R.D. is squawking his head off on account the studio stock company is berlin' over with talent Eli has signed up. 'But listen, Eli,' I says to him, 'Dixie is diffrint. She talks a nice grammar and you can get her fa a hundritt-fifdy, two hundritt, and you'll be doin' me a very special favor.' So finery he says, O.K., just fa old palship's sake he might squeeze in a little more room, and I should bring her over around noon.

"I take Dixie to the door and I break the news that I got her set. She hugs me and kisses me just like she was a little girl. 'Honey,' I says to her, 'I'm gonna try to shake Eli about eleven-twelve o'clock tonight. Gimme a buzz at home 'cause I may want you should come over to discuss the contrack.' And she says, 'I'm sorry, Benny, but I figger I need the sleep so I can look O.K. in the mornin'. But I'll keep tomorra night open 'cause by tomorra night the papers should be signed.' A first-class head that kid got on her shoulders!

"Well, Eli and me, we sit around *shmoosing* about this, that and the other thing, and he's punishin' off the brandy all doong this. Finery he says to me, 'Benny, I feel this is my lucky night. I ain't been to the Castle Club since the time I dropped three grand and Gussie wouldn't speak to me a whole week. But somehow I got an inklin' in my bones that tonight is my lucky night.'

"Please, Eli,' I beg him, 'don't go, 'cause you might regret it when you'll get a little drunkee and maybe lose—who knows?—another three grand.' 'Not me!' he says. 'In the first place, they got orders fomm me I shouldn't get any more credit. And in the second place, all I got with me is about a hundritt bucks. Look,' he says, 'I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll play so long as this hundritt holds out and no further.' 'And if you're winnin'?' I says. 'If I'm winnin',' he says, 'I'll drag down and give you the dough, and when I'm a hundritt ahead I'll quit. In other words, Benny,' he says, 'a hundritt either way. So we'll have a little pleasure, a little fun, and nobody will get their fingers burnt.' That sounded pretty logical to me.

"So we goes to the Castle Club, and he buys a stack of chips and walks over to the crap table and waits fa his roll. In half an hour he's down to four five-dolla chips, the dice are so cold. Finery he puts them all on the line and, Artie, alluva sudden the dice go hot

on him. But so hot, they're burnin'! Twelve straight passes in a row he makes, and he's draggin' all the time and slippin' me the chips. God alone knows hommuch he woulda made if he'da let the stack ride.

"So finey he cracks, and I counts the chips and I says to him, 'Eli, you are awmost four hundritt bucks to the good. Let's blow.' 'Why blow now?' he says. 'Why not make it an even five hundritt and then we'll scam?'"

"Well, he dropped about two C's before the dice went his way again. This time he din do no draggin' but let it ride. When we counted, he was over a grand ahead.

"'Please, Eli,' I beg him, and he's punishin' off the brandy somethin' awful, 'let's quit now. You got your fun and a profit besides. What more do you want?' 'Don't be a dope,' he says. 'The dice are hot and friendly, and you're astin' I should walk out on them!'"

"The upshoot of the whole matter was the dice froze on him. 'Remember,' I says to him when I gave him back the original stack, 'you promised to blow when you lost this.'

"I went to the men's room to hide; I couldn't stand around the table, I was so nervous. But he found me. 'Benny,' he says, and I could tell he was plenty *fashnootzkied*, 'Benny, they won't gimme no credit here. I want you should write a check for five hundritt and cash it.' 'I won't do it,' I tells him. 'You gimme your sacred word of honor you'd oney lose a C and now you wanna borry more money to lose. I won't do it!'"

"Artie, you shoulda heard what he said there in the men's room! Evveybody in the place must of heard us. He tells me I got a fat chance to place my artists over at Unity so long as he's got a job there! He tells me he never wantsa see me again, socially nor otherwise!"

"'Eli,' I says to him, 'I'm oney lookin' out fa your protection, Eli. Dincha ast me to take you outa here when you dropped the hundritt?' 'Are you or ain't you gonna cash a check?' What could I do? I cashed the check, gave him the dough, and I beat it.

"This mornin', after she does some shoppin', I picks up Dixie and I takes her over to Eli's awfice. When he hears I'm waitin' outside, he rushes out and, Artie, the langwich he uses to me—a hog-carrier don't use such langwich! I'm a fine friend, he says. A no-good dirty louse and a stinker I am, he says, 'cause I know Gussie's temper, and still and all I let him gamble.

"'But, Eli,' I says to him, 'you wouldn't leave the place. You insisted and insisted on stayin', and finey you made me cash my check fa five hundrutt bucks.' 'Oh, I suppose I came along and I put a pistol to your head? I suppose I forced you with a club to gimme that money?' And then he had the nerve to say I delibbetly cashed the check so I could have the satisfaction of seein' him lose still some more. And to add insults to injury, he says I should live so long if I expeck to see a cent fomm the dough I cashed fa him. I should please get the hell out and stay out!

"And that Dixie! Listen. I ain't got enough trouble sayin' good-by to a palship of fifteen years' standin', this Dixie should bother me about who's gonna pay fa the star-sapphire ring she bought this mornin' on the strenth of the contrack. I'm very disappointed in Dixie, I must say. A very unusual type girl I thought she was. I'm very disappointed, on account she could return that ring if she wanted to.

"Yeah, Artie, you can't blame me fa bein' like a bar rag today. Today I lost three things. I hadda say good-by to a palship of fifteen years' standin'. And I hadda say good-by to Dixie. Gee, when I think how I awmost got her a job—a girl with that personality and talent! Ah, well."

"What's the third thing you lost, Benny?" I asked as he polished off his drink.

"The five hundrutt bucks. Well, that ain't really lost," he admitted. "I dropped over the bank the first thing this mornin' and I ordered the check stopped."

Another round of drinks was ordered, and there was the usual horsing around about paying the check.

"Heaven and earth themselves couldn't make me put Eli Leonard on the spot," he said, surveying the bowl now empty of the potato chips. "I'd put my arm in the fire. In the fire, up to here." He tapped the muscle of his extended arm to illustrate. "But why the hell should I spend five hundrutt bucks on a guy who with one snap of the fingers throws away a palship of fifteen years? Why?"

LIBERTY HALL



Ring Lardner

MY HUSBAND is in Atlantic City, where they are trying out *Dear Dora*, the musical version of *David Copperfield*. My husband wrote the score. He used to take me along for these out-of-town openings, but not any more.

He, of course, has to spend almost all his time in the theatre and that leaves me alone in the hotel, and pretty soon people find out whose wife I am and introduce themselves, and the next thing you know they are inviting us for a week or a week end at Dobbs Ferry or Oyster Bay. Then it is up to me to think of some legitimate-sounding reason why we can't come.

In lots of cases they say, "Well, if you can't make it the twenty-second, how about the twenty-ninth?" and so on till you simply have to accept. And Ben gets mad and stays mad for days.

He absolutely abhors visiting and thinks there ought to be a law against invitations that go beyond dinner and bridge. He doesn't mind hotels where there is a decent light for reading in bed and one for shaving, and where you can order meals, with coffee, any time you want them. But I really believe he would rather spend a week in the death house at Sing Sing than in somebody else's home.

Three or four years ago we went around quite a lot with a couple whom I will call the Buckleys. We liked them and they liked us. We had dinner together at least twice a week and after dinner we played bridge or went to a show or just sat and talked.

Ben never turned down their invitations and often actually called them up himself and suggested parties. Finally they moved to Albany on account of Mr. Buckley's business. We missed them

a great deal, and when Mrs. Buckley wrote for us to come up there for the holidays we were tickled pink.

Well, their guest-room was terribly cold; it took hours to fill the bathtub; there was no reading-lamp by the bed; three reporters called to interview Ben, two of them kittenish young girls; the breakfasts were just fruit and cereal and toast; coffee was not served at luncheon; the faucets in the wash-basin were the kind that won't run unless you keep pressing them; four important keys on the piano were stuck and people were invited in every night to hear Ben play, and the Buckley family had been augmented by a tremendous police dog, who was "just a puppy and never growled or snapped at anyone he knew," but couldn't seem to remember that Ben was not an utter stranger.

On the fourth awful day Ben gave out the news—news to him and to me as well as to our host and hostess—that he had lost a filling which he would not trust any but his own New York dentist to replace. We came home and we have never seen the Buckleys since. If we do see them it will be an accident. They will hardly ask us there unless we ask them here, and we won't ask them here for fear they would ask us there. And they were honestly the most congenial people we ever met.

It was after our visit to the Craigs at Stamford that Ben originated what he calls his "emergency exit." We had such a horrible time at the Craigs' and such a worse time getting away that Ben swore he would pay no more visits until he could think up a graceful method of curtailing them in the event they proved unbearable.

Here is the scheme he hit on: He would write himself a telegram and sign it with the name Ziegfeld or Gene Buck or Dillingham or George M. Cohan. The telegram would say that he must return to New York at once, and it would give a reason. Then, the day we started out, he would leave it with Irene, the girl at Harms', his publishers, with instructions to have it sent to him twenty-four hours later.

When it arrived at whatever town we were in, he would either have the host or hostess take it over the telephone or ask the telegraph company to deliver it so he could show it around. We would put on long faces and say how sorry we were, but of course business was business, so good-by and so forth. There was never a breath of suspicion even when the telegram was ridiculous, like

the one Ben had sent to himself at Spring Lake, where we were staying with the Marshalls just after "Betty's Birthday" opened at the Globe. The Marshalls loved musical shows, but knew less than nothing about music and swallowed this one whole:

SHAW AND MISS MILLER BOTH SUFFERING FROM LARYNGITIS
STOP ENTIRE SCORE MUST BE REWRITTEN HALF TONE LOWER
STOP COME AT ONCE STOP.

C. B. DILLINGHAM.

If, miraculously, Ben had ever happened to be enjoying himself, he would, of course, have kept the contents of his message a secret or else displayed it and remarked swaggeringly that he guessed he wasn't going to let any so-and-so theatrical producer spoil his fun.

Ben is in Atlantic City now and I have read every book in the house and am writing this just because there doesn't seem to be anything else to do. And also because we have a friend, Joe Frazier, who is a magazine editor and the other day I told him I would like to try my hand at a short story, but I was terrible at plots, and he said plots weren't essential; look at Ernest Hemingway; most of his stories have hardly any plot; it's his style that counts. And he—I mean Mr. Frazier—suggested that I write about our visit to Mr. and Mrs. Thayer in Lansdowne, outside of Philadelphia, which, Mr. Frazier said, might be termed the visit that ended visits and which is the principal reason why I am here alone.

Well, it was a beautiful night a year ago last September. Ben was conducting the performance—*Step Lively*—and I was standing at the railing of the Boardwalk in front of the theatre, watching the moonlight on the ocean. A couple whom I had noticed in the hotel dining room stopped alongside of me and pretty soon the woman spoke to me, something about how pretty it was. Then came the old question, wasn't I Mrs. Ben Drake? I said I was, and the woman went on:

"My name is Mrs. Thayer—Hilda Thayer. And this is my husband. We are both simply crazy about Mr. Drake's music and just dying to meet him personally. We wondered if you and he would have supper with us after the performance tonight."

"Oh, I'm afraid that's impossible," I replied. "You see when they are having a tryout, he and the librettists and the lyric writers

work all night every night until they get everything in shape for the New York opening. They never have time for more than a sandwich and they eat that right in the theatre."

"Well, how about luncheon tomorrow?"

"He'll be rehearsing all day."

"How about dinner tomorrow evening?"

"Honestly, Mrs. Thayer, it's out of the question. Mr. Drake never makes engagements during a tryout week."

"And I guess he doesn't want to meet us anyway," put in Mr. Thayer. "What use would a genius like Ben Drake have for a couple of common-no-account admirers like Mrs. Thayer and myself! If we were 'somebody' too, it would be different!"

"Not at all!" said I. "Mr. Drake is perfectly human. He loves to have his music praised and I am sure he would be delighted to meet you if he weren't so terribly busy."

"Can you lunch with us yourself?"

"Tomorrow?"

"Any day."

Well, whatever Ben and other husbands may think, there is no decent way of turning down an invitation like that. And besides I was lonesome and the Thayers looked like awfully nice people.

I lunched with them and I dined with them, not only the next day but all the rest of the week. And on Friday I got Ben to lunch with them and he liked them, too; they were not half as gushing and silly as most of his "fans."

At dinner on Saturday night, they cross-examined me about our immediate plans. I told them that as soon as the show was "over" in New York, I was going to try to make Ben stay home and do nothing for a whole month.

"I should think," said Mrs. Thayer, "it would be very hard for him to rest there in the city, with the producers and publishers and phonograph people calling him up all the time."

I admitted that he was bothered a lot.

"Listen, dearie," said Mrs. Thayer. "Why don't you come to Lansdowne and spend a week with us? I'll promise you faithfully that you won't be disturbed at all. I won't let anyone know you are there and if any of our friends call on us I'll pretend we're not at home. I won't allow Mr. Drake to even touch the piano. If he wants exercise, there are miles of room in our yard to walk around in, and nobody can see him from the street. All day and all night,

he can do nothing or anything, just as he pleases. It will be 'Liberty Hall' for you both. He needn't tell anybody where he is, but if some of his friends or business acquaintances find out and try to get in touch with him, I'll frighten them away. How does that sound?"

"It sounds wonderful," I said, "but—"

"It's settled then," said Mrs. Thayer, "and we'll expect you on Sunday, October eleventh."

"Oh, but the show may not be 'set' by that time," I remonstrated.

"How about the eighteenth?" said Mr. Thayer.

Well, it ended by my accepting for the week of the twenty-fifth and Ben took it quite cheerfully.

"If they stick to their promise to keep us under cover," he said, "it may be a lot better than staying in New York. I know that Buck and the Shuberts and Ziegfeld want me while I'm 'hot' and they wouldn't give me a minute's peace if they could find me. And of course if things aren't as good as they look, Irene's telegram will provide us with an easy out."

On the way over to Philadelphia he hummed me an awfully pretty melody which had been running through his head since we left the apartment. "I think it's sure fire," he said. "I'm crazy to get to a piano and fool with it."

"That isn't resting, dear."

"Well, you don't want me to throw away a perfectly good tune! They aren't so plentiful that I can afford to waste one. It won't take me five minutes at a piano to get it fixed in my mind."

The Thayers met us in an expensive-looking limousine.

"Ralph," said Mrs. Thayer to her husband, "you sit in one of the little seats and Mr. and Mrs. Drake will sit back here with me."

"I'd really prefer one of the little seats myself," said Ben and he meant it, for he hates to get his clothes mussed and being squeezed in beside two such substantial objects as our hostess and myself was bound to rumple him.

"No, sir!" said Mrs. Thayer positively. "You came to us for a rest and we're not going to start you off uncomfortable."

"But I'd honestly rather—"

It was no use. Ben was wedged between us and throughout the drive maintained a morose silence, unable to think of anything but how terrible his coat would look when he got out.

The Thayers had a very pretty home and the room assigned to us was close to perfection. There were comfortable twin beds with a small stand and convenient reading-lamp between; a big dresser and chiffonier; an ample closet with plenty of hangers; a bathroom with hot water that was hot, towels that were not too new and faucets that stayed on when turned on, and an ashtray within reach of wherever you happened to be. If only we could have spent all our time in that guest-room, it would have been ideal.

But presently we were summoned downstairs to luncheon. I had warned Mrs. Thayer in advance and Ben was served with coffee. He drinks it black.

"Don't you take cream, Mr. Drake?"

"No. Never."

"But that's because you don't get good cream in New York."

"No. It's because I don't like cream in coffee."

"You would like our cream. We have our own cows and the cream is so rich that it's almost like butter. Won't you try just a little?"

"No, thanks."

"But just a little, to see how rich it is."

She poured about a tablespoonful of cream into his coffee cup and for a second I was afraid he was going to pick up the cup and throw it in her face. But he kept hold of himself, forced a smile and declined a second chop.

"You haven't tasted your coffee," said Mrs. Thayer.

"Yes, I have," lied Ben. "The cream is wonderful. I'm sorry it doesn't agree with me."

"I don't believe coffee agrees with anyone," said Mrs. Thayer. "While you are here, not doing any work, why don't you try to give it up?"

"I'd be so irritable you wouldn't have me in the house. Besides, it isn't plain coffee that disagrees with me; it's coffee with cream."

"Pure, rich cream like ours couldn't hurt you," said Mrs. Thayer, and Ben, defeated, refused to answer.

He started to light a Jaguar cigarette, the brand he had been smoking for years.

"Here! Wait a minute!" said Mr. Thayer. "Try one of mine."

"What are they?" asked Ben.

"Trumps," said our host, holding out his case. "They're mild and won't irritate the throat."

"I'll sample one later," said Ben.

"You've simply got to try one now," said Mrs. Thayer. "You may as well get used to them because you'll have to smoke them all the time you're here. We can't have guests providing their own cigarettes." So Ben had to discard his Jaguar and smoke a Trump, and it was even worse than he had anticipated.

After luncheon we adjourned to the living room and Ben went straight to the piano.

"Here! Here! None of that!" said Mrs. Thayer. "I haven't forgotten my promise."

"What promise?" asked Ben.

"Didn't your wife tell you? I promised her faithfully that if you visited us, you wouldn't be allowed to touch the piano."

"But I want to," said Ben. "There's a melody in my head that I'd like to try."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," said Mrs. Thayer. "You just think you've got to entertain us! Nothing doing! We invited you here for yourself, not to enjoy your talent. I'd be a fine one to ask you to my home for a rest and then make you perform."

"You're not making me," said Ben. "Honestly I want to play for just five or ten minutes. I've got a tune that I might do something with and I'm anxious to run it over."

"I don't believe you, you naughty man!" said our hostess. "Your wife has told you how wild we are about your music and you're determined to be nice to us. But I'm just as stubborn as you are. Not one note do you play as long as you're our guest!"

Ben favored me with a stricken look, mumbled something about unpacking his suitcase—it was already unpacked—and went up to our room, where he stayed nearly an hour, jotting down his new tune, smoking Jaguar after Jaguar and wishing that black coffee flowed from bathtub faucets.

About a quarter of four Mr. Thayer insisted on taking him around the place and showing him the shrubbery, something that held in Ben's mind a place of equal importance to the grade of wire used in hairpins.

"I'll have to go to business tomorrow," said Mr. Thayer, "and you will be left to amuse yourself. I thought you might enjoy this planting more if you knew a little about it. Of course it's much prettier in the spring of the year."

"I can imagine so."

"You must come over next spring and see it."

"I'm usually busy in the spring," said Ben.

"Before we go in," said Mr. Thayer, "I'd like to ask you one question: Do tunes come into your mind and then you write them down, or do you just sit at the piano and improvise until you strike something good?"

"Sometimes one way and sometimes the other," said Ben.

"That's very interesting," said Mr. Thayer. "I've often wondered how it was done. And another question: Do you write the tunes first and then give them to the men who write the words, or do the men write the words first and then give them to you to make up the music to them?"

"Sometimes one way and sometimes the other," said Ben.

"That's very interesting," said Mr. Thayer. "It's something I'm glad to know. And now we'd better join the ladies or my wife will say I'm monopolizing you."

They joined us, much to my relief. I had just reached a point where I would either have had to tell "Hilda" exactly how much Ben earned per annum or that it was none of her business.

"Well!" said Mrs. Thayer to Ben. "I was afraid Ralph had kidnaped you."

"He was showing me the shrubbery," said Ben.

"What did you think of it?"

"It's great shrubbery," said Ben, striving to put some warmth into his voice.

"You must come and see it in the spring."

"I'm usually busy in the spring."

"Ralph and I are mighty proud of our shrubbery."

"You have a right to be."

Ben was taking a book out of the bookcase.

"What book is that?" asked Mrs. Thayer.

"*The Great Gatsby*," said Ben. "I've always wanted to read it but never got around to it."

"Heavens!" said Mrs. Thayer as she took it away from him. "That's old! You'll find the newest ones there on the table. We keep pretty well up to date. Ralph and I are both great readers. Just try any one of those books in that pile. They're all good."

Ben glanced them over and selected *Chevrons*. He sat down and opened it.

"Man! Man!" exclaimed Mrs. Thayer. "You've picked the most uncomfortable chair in the house!"

"He likes straight chairs," I said.

"That's on the square," said Ben.

"But you mustn't sit there," said Mrs. Thayer. "It makes me uncomfortable just to look at you. Take this chair here. It's the softest, nicest chair you've ever sat in."

"I like hard straight chairs," said Ben, but he sank into the soft, nice one and again opened his book.

"Oh, you never can see there!" said Mrs. Thayer. "You'll ruin your eyes! Get up just a minute and let Ralph move your chair by that lamp."

"I can see perfectly well."

"I know better! Ralph, move his chair so he can see."

"I don't believe I want to read just now anyway," said Ben, and went to the phonograph. "Bess," he said, putting on a record, "here's that 'Oh! Miss Hannah!' by the Revelers."

Mrs. Thayer fairly leaped to his side, and herded Miss Hannah back into her stall.

"We've got lots later ones than that," she said. "Let me play you the new Gershwins."

It was at this juncture that I began to suspect our hostess of a lack of finesse. After all, Gershwin is a rival of my husband's and, in some folks' opinion, a worthy one. However, Ben had a word of praise for each record as it ended and did not even hint that any of the tunes were based on melodies of his own.

"Mr. Drake," said our host at length, "would you like a gin cocktail or a Bacardi?"

"I don't like Bacardi at all," said Ben.

"I'll bet you will like the kind I've got," said Mr. Thayer. "It was brought to me by a friend of mine who just got back from Cuba. It's the real stuff!"

"I don't like Bacardi," said Ben.

"Wait till you taste this," said Mr. Thayer.

Well, we had Bacardi cocktails. I drank mine and it wasn't so good. Ben took a sip of his and pretended it was all right. But he had told the truth when he said he didn't like Bacardi.

I won't go into details regarding the dinner except to relate that three separate items were highly flavored with cheese, and Ben despises cheese.

"Don't you care for cheese, Mr. Drake?" asked Mr. Thayer, noticing that Ben was not exactly bolting his food.

"No," replied the guest of honor.

"He's spoofing you, Ralph," said Mrs. Thayer. "Everybody likes cheese."

There was coffee, and Ben managed to guzzle a cup before it was desecrated with pure cream.

We sat down to bridge.

"Do you like to play families or divide up?"

"Oh, we like to play together," said I.

"I'll bet you don't," said Mrs. Thayer. "Suppose Ralph and you play Mr. Drake and me. I think it's a mistake for husbands and wives to be partners. They're likely to criticize one another and say things that leave a scar."

Well, Mr. Thayer and I played against Ben and Mrs. Thayer and I lost sixty cents at a tenth of a cent a point. Long before the evening was over I could readily see why Mrs. Thayer thought it was a mistake to play with her husband and if it had been possible I'd have left him a complete set of scars.

Just as we were getting to sleep, Mrs. Thayer knocked on our door.

"I'm afraid you haven't covers enough," she called. "There are extra blankets on the shelf in your closet."

"Thanks," I said. "We're as warm as toast."

"I'm afraid you aren't," said Mrs. Thayer.

"Lock the door," said Ben, "before she comes in and feels our feet."

All through breakfast next morning we waited in vain for the telephone call that would yield Irene's message. The phone rang once and Mrs. Thayer answered, but we couldn't hear what she said. At noon Ben signaled me to meet him upstairs and there he stated grimly that I might do as I choose, but he was leaving Liberty Hall ere another sun had set.

"You haven't any excuse," I reminded him.

"I'm a genius," he said, "and geniuses are notoriously eccentric."

"Geniuses' wives sometimes get eccentric, too," said I, and began to pack up.

Mr. Thayer had gone to Philadelphia and we were alone with our hostess at luncheon.

"Mrs. Thayer," said Ben, "do you ever have premonitions or hunches?"

She looked frightened. "Why, no. Do you?"

"I had one not half an hour ago. Something told me that I positively must be in New York tonight. I don't know whether it's business or illness or what, but I've just got to be there!"

"That's the strangest thing I ever heard of," said Mrs. Thayer. "It scares me to death!"

"It's nothing you need be scared of," said Ben. "It only concerns me."

"Yes, but listen," said Mrs. Thayer. "A telegram came for you at breakfast time this morning. I wasn't going to tell you about it because I had promised that you wouldn't be disturbed. And it didn't seem so terribly important. But this hunch of yours puts the matter in a different light. I'm sorry now that I didn't give you the message when I got it, but I memorized it and can repeat it word for word: 'Mr. Ben Drake, care of Mr. Ralph Thayer, Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. In Nile song, second bar of refrain, bass drum part reads A flat which makes discord. Should it be A natural? Would appreciate your coming to theatre tonight to straighten this out as harmony must be restored in orchestra if troupe is to be success. Regards, Gene Buck.'"

"It sounds silly, doesn't it?" said Ben. "And yet I have known productions to fail and lose hundreds of thousands of dollars just because an author or composer left town too soon. I can well understand that you considered the message trivial. At the same time I can thank my stars that this instinct, or divination, or whatever you want to call it, told me to go home."

Just as the trainmen were shouting "Board!" Mrs. Thayer said:

"I have one more confession to make. I answered Mr. Buck's telegram. I wired him. 'Mr. Ben Drake resting at my home. Must not be bothered. Suggest that you keep bass drums still for a week.' And I signed my name. Please forgive me if I have done something terrible. Remember, it was for you."

Small wonder that Ben was credited at the Lambs' Club with that month's most interesting bender.

LET'S PLAY KING

*Sinclair Lewis*

IN FRONT of the Y Wurry Gas & Fixit Station, at Mechanicville, New York, the proprietor, Mr. Rabbit Tait, sat elegantly upon a kitchen chair. He was a figure, that Rabbit Tait—christened Thomas. His trousers might be spotty, and their hem resembled the jagged edges of magnified razor blades shown in the advertisements, but his shirt was purple, with narrow red stripes, his sleeve garters were of silvered metal, and on one sausagelike forefinger was a ring with a ruby which would have been worth two hundred thousand dollars had it not been made of glass.

Mr. Tait was not tall, but he was comfortably round; his face was flushed; his red mustache was so beautifully curled that he resembled a detective; and his sandy hair was roached down over his forehead in one of the most elegant locks ever seen on the wrong side of a mahogany bar.

Out from the neat white cottage behind the filling station, a residence with all modern conveniences except bathrooms, gas and electricity, charged his spouse, Mrs. Bessie Tait, herding their son Terry.

Now Bessie was not beautiful. She had a hard-boiled-egg forehead and a flatiron jaw, which harmonized with her milk-can voice to compose a domestic symphony. Nor was Rabbit Tait, for all his dashing air, an Apollo. But Terry, aged six, was a freak of beauty.

He was too good to be true. He had, surely, come off a magazine cover. He had golden hair, like blown thistledown in a sunset, his skin was white silk, his big eyes violet, his nose straight, and his mouth had twisting little smiles which caused the most loyal drunkards to go home and reform.

How he had ever happened to Rabbit and Bessie Tait, how the angels (or the stork, or Doc McQueech) had ever happened to leave Terry in the cottage behind the Y Wurry Filling Station instead of in the baronial clapboard castle of the Mechanicville banker, is a mystery which is left to the eugenists.

Bessie was speaking in a manner not befitting the mother of a Christmas-card cherub:

"For the love of Mike, Rabbit, are you going to sit there on your chair all afternoon? Why don't you get busy?"

"Yeah?" contributed the cherub's father. "Sure! Whajjuh wamme do? Go out and grab some bozo's bus by the radiator cap and make him come in and buy some gas?"

"Well, you kin fix the screen door, can't you?"

"The screen door?"

"Yes, the screen door, you poor glue!"

"The screen door? Is it busted?"

"Oh, heck, no; it ain't busted! I just want you to come and scratch its back where the mosquitoes been biting it, you poor sap! And then you can take care of this brat. Under my feet the whole doggone day!"

She slapped Terry, generously and skillfully, and as Terry howled, Rabbit rose uneasily, pale behind the bronze splendor of his curled mustache. Bessie was obviously in one of her more powerful moods, and it is to be feared that we should have had the distressing spectacle of Mr. Tait going to work, driven by his good lady's iron jaw and granite will, had not, that second, a limousine stopped at the filling station.

In the limousine was a lady so rich, so rich and old, that she had to be virtuous. She had white hair and a complexion like an old china cup. Glancing out while Rabbit Tait cheerily turned the handle of the gas pump, she saw Terry.

"Oh!" she squealed. "What an angelic child! Is it yours?"

"Yes, ma'am," chuckled Rabbit, while Bessie ranged forward, beaming on the treasure she had so recently slapped.

"He ought to be a choir boy," said the refined old lady. "He would be simply darling, at St. Juke's, in Albany. You must take him there, and introduce him to Doctor Wimple, the curate—he's so fond of the little ones! I'm sure your dear little boy could be sent to some church school free, and *think*—these dreadful modern

days—otherwise, with his beauty, he might get drawn into the movies as a child star, or some frightful thing like that, and be ruined! Good morning!”

“Jiminy, that’s a swell old dame!” observed the dear little boy as the limousine swam away.

Bessie absently slapped him, and mused, “Say, Rabbit, the old lettuce gimme a good idea. The kid might do good in the movies.”

“Say, he might, at that. Gee, maybe he could make a hundred bucks a week. I’ve heard some of these kids do. Golly, I’d like to have a cane with a silver dog’s-head top!”

“Tom Tait, you get on your coat, and as soon as I scrub the kid’s mug and change his clothes, you take him right straight down to the Main Street Foto Shoppe—I’ll mind the pump—and you get some pictures of him and we’ll shoot ’em out to Hollywood.”

“Oh, you gimme a big fat pain—hot day like this,” sighed Mr. Tait and, gloomily, “Besides, I might miss a job changing an inner tube. Just like you—throw away fifty cents on a fool chance that we might be able to farm the brat out at maybe fifty bucks a week some day, *maybe!*”

“I don’t play no maybes, never,” said Bessie Tait.

Mr. Abraham Hamilton Granville, president and G.M. of the Jupiter-Triumph-Tait Film Corporation, had adorned his Spanish mansion at Poppy Peaks, California, with the largest private fishbowl in the known world. Other movie satraps might have Pompeian swimming pools, cathedral organs and ballrooms floored with platinum, but it was Mr. Granville’s genius—so had it been, indeed, ever since he had introduced the Holdfast Patent Button, which had put over the renowned Abe Grossburg Little Gents’ Pants Co., back in 1903—I say it was Mr. Granville’s peculiar genius that he always thought up something a little different.

He had caused cunning craftsmen to erect a fishbowl—no vulgar aquarium but a real, classy, round, glass, parlor fishbowl—twenty feet high and sixty in circumference, on the red-and-green marble terrace of his mansion, Casa Scarlatta.

Poppy Peaks is an addition to Hollywood, built by the more refined and sensitive and otherwise rich members of the movie colony when Hollywood itself became too common for their aristocratic tradition. And of all the county families and nobility of Poppy Peaks, none were more select than the intellectual powers

gathered about Mr. Granville this hazy California August afternoon.

Besides Mr. Granville and the production manager, Mr. Eisbein, there was Wiggins, the press agent—formerly the most celebrated red-dog player and mint-julep specialist on the coast, a man who was questionable only in his belief that mange cure will cause thinning mouse-colored hair to turn into raven richness. Was also Miss Lilac Lavery Lugg, writer of the scenarios for such masterpieces of cinematographic passion as *Mad Maids*, *Midnight Madness*, and *Maids o' the Midnight*. She was thirty-eight and had never been kissed.

But even more important than these mad magnates o' midnight was a quiet and genteel family sitting together in scarlet-painted basket chairs.

The father of the family was a gentleman named Mr. T. Benescoten Tait. He had a handsome ruddy mustache, curled, and a gold cigarette case; he wore a lavender suit, white spats, patent-leather shoes, eyeglasses with a broad silk ribbon, and a walking stick whose top was a dog's-head of gold with ruby eyes.

His lady was less cheering in appearance, but more notable; she wore a white-striped black suit with python-skin slippers. She sat rigid, with eyes like headlights.

And the third of the family was Terry Tait, billed throughout the entire world as "The King of Boy Comedians."

He was in English shorts, with a Byronesque silk shirt open at the throat. But on the back of one manicured hand was a grievous smear of dirt, which more suggested raising Cain in Mechanicville, New York, than being sweet in Poppy Peaks; and crouched behind him was a disreputable specimen of that celebrated breed of canines, a Boy's Dog, who would never be exhibited in any dog show except a strictly private one behind an ill-favored barn.

Terry was ten, this summer of 1930.

"Well, Miss Lugg," Granville said briskly, "what's your idea for the new Terrytait?"

"Oh, I've got a perfectly priceless idea this time. Terry plays a poor little Ytalian bootblack—he's really the son of a count, but he got kidnaped—"

Terry crossed over center stage and yammered, "I won't do it! I've been the newsboy that squealed on the gang, and I've been the son of the truck driver that got adopted by the banker, and I've

been Oliver Twist and—I hate these doggone poor-city-boy roles! I want to be a boy cowboy, or an Apache!”

Miss Lugg squealed, “I’ve got it! How about his playing the drummer boy of the regiment—Civil War stuff—saves the General when he’s wounded, and Lincoln invites him to the White House?”

Miss Lugg was soaring into genius before their awed eyes. But she was interrupted by the circular-saw voice of Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait:

“Not on your life! Not a chance! Terry in them awful battle scenes with all them tough mob extras falling over him? That’s always the trouble with wars—they make good scenes but somebody is likely to get hurt. No, sir!”

“*Was ist das denn fur ein Hutzpah!*” growled Mr. Abraham Hamilton Granville. “Der Terry should take a chance, what we pay him!”

Mrs. Tait sprang up, a fury on ice. “Yeah! A miserable two thousand a week! Believe me, on the next contract it’s going to be four thousand, and if it don’t come from Jupiter, there’s others that’ll pay it. Why, we don’t hardly make expenses on two grand, having to keep up a swell social position so none of these bozos like Franchot can high-hat us, and Terry’s French tutor and his dancing teacher and his trainer and his chauffeur and—and— And thank heaven I’m not ambitious like a lot of these bums that want to show off how swell they are.

“Hones’ sometimes I wish we’d stayed back in Mechanicville! Mr. Tait had a large garage there—we saved more money than what we can here, the way you hogs want to grab off all the coin and don’t never think about the Artist and his folks and how they got to live.”

“Yes, yes, yes, maybe that’s so. Well, what’s your idea of his next role, Bessie?” soothed Mr. Granville.

Mr. Tait suggested, “I got an idea that—”

“You have not! You never did have!” said Bessie. “Now, I think it would be nice if—I’d just love to see my Terrykins as this here Lost Dophing—this son of Napoleon or Looey or whoever he was—you know, Leglong. Miss Lugg can look up all the historical dope on him. I think Terry’d look lovely in satin tights with a ruff!”

“Oh, gee!” wailed Terry.

"I don't," continued Mrs. Tait, with severe virtue, "like to see my little boy playing these newsboy and hard-up roles all the time. I don't think it's a good influence on all his Following. It ain't progress. And him with his wardrobe!"

While Mrs. Tait sermonized, the butler had brought out the four-o'clock cocktail tray and the afternoon papers, and Wiggins, the rusty press agent, had escaped from the sound of Bessie's voice into a nice wholesome Chicago murder story.

He piped, now:

"Say, talking about your Lost Dauphin dope, Bess, here's one in real life. Seems in the paper, King Udo of Slovaria died last night of heart failure and his heir is his son, Maximilian—King Maximilian III, he'll be—and the poor kid is only ten. Youngest king in the world. But where the heck is Slovaria?"

"You tellum, Terry," said Bessie Tait. "Terry is a wonder at jography, same as I always was."

"I don't want to!" protested the wonder.

"You do what I tell you to, or I won't let you play baseball with the butler's kids! I'll—I'll make you go to tea at Princess Marchecella's!"

"Oh, darn!" sighed Terry.

Then he recited, with the greatest speed and lack of expression, "Slovaria is a Balkan kingdom bounded on the north by Roumania, on the east by Zenda, on the south by Bulgaria, and on the west by Graustark. The capital is Tzetokoskavar. The principal rivers are the Rjekl and the Zgosca. The exports are cattle, hides, cheese and wool. The reigning monarch is Udo VII, who is descended from the renowned warrior King Hieronymus, and who is united in wedlock to the famous beauty Sidonie, a cousin of the former German Kaiser . . . Say, Mamma, what's a Balkan kingdom? Is it in China?"

"Now listen to him, will you? I bet there ain't a kid in Hollywood that's got as swell a tutor or 's educated as good as he is!" purred Mrs. Tait. "I was always like that, too—just crazy about books and education."

"Wait! Wait! I've got it!" shrieked Miss Lilac Lavery Lugg. "Here's our scenario, and the publicity about this new kid king will help to put it over. Listen! Terry is the boy king of a—"

"I don't want to be a king! I want to be an Apache!" wailed Terry, but no one heeded.

Everyone (excepting Terry, Terry's mongrel pup and the butler) listened with hot eyes, as they were caught up by the whirlwind of Lilac's genius:

"Terry is the boy king of a Near-Eastern country. Scenes in the palace—poor kid, awful' lonely, sitting on throne, end of a big throne room—the Diplomatic Hotel might let us shoot their lobby again, like we did in *Long Live the Czar!* Big gang of guards in these fur hats. Saluting. Show how he's a grand kid—scene of him being nice to a poor little orphan in the yard at the castle and his kitty had busted her leg, but he's so sick and tired of all this royal grandeur that he turns democratic on his guard and the court and all them, and he's meaner than a toothache to his guards and the prime minister—the prime minister'll be a grand comedy character, with long whiskers. And the sub-plot is an American reporter, a tall, handsome bird that's doing the Balkans, and say, he's the spitting image of the king's uncle—the uncle is the heavy; he's trying to grab the throne off the poor li'l tike. Well, one day the king—the kid—is out in the castle grounds taking his exercise, riding horseback. He's followed by a coupla hundred cavalry troops, and he treats 'em something fierce, hits 'em and so on.

"Well, this American reporter, he's there in the grounds, and the king sees him and thinks it's his uncle, and he says to his troops, 'Go on, beat it; there's my uncle,' he says; 'he wants to grab the throne, but I'm not scared of him; I'll meet him alone.' And so he rides up to this fellow and draws his sword."

"Would he have a sword, li'l kid like that?" hinted T. Benescoten.

"Of course he would, you fathead!" snapped Bessie. "Haven't you seen any pictures of the Prince of Wales? Kings and all like that always wear uniforms and swords—except maybe when they're playing golf. Or swimming."

"Certainly!" Lilac looked icily at T. Benescoten.

Everybody, save his son Terry, usually looked icily at T. Benescoten.

"Ziz saying," Lilac continued, "he draws his sword and rushes at what he thinks is his uncle, but the fellow speaks and he realizes it ain't his uncle. Then they get to talking. I think there ought to be a flashback showing the reporter's—the hero's—happy life in Oklahoma as a boy; how he played baseball and all that. And then

the reporter—he's seen how mean the boy king is to his men, and he gives the poor li'l kid his first lesson in acting nice and democratic, like all American kids do, and the king is awful' sorry he was so mean, and he thinks this reporter is the nicest bird he ever met, and they're walking through the grounds and they meet the king's sister—she's the female lead—I can see Katinka Kettleson playing the role—and the reporter and the princess fall in love at first sight—of course later the reporter rescues the princess and the king from the uncle—big ball at the palace, with a ballet, and the uncle plans to kidnap the king, and the reporter, he's learned all about the extensive secret passages, or maybe they might even be catacombs, under the palace, and he leads them away and there's a slick fight in the woods, the reporter used to be a fencing champion and he engages the uncle in battle—swords, you know—while the poor little king and the unfortunate princess crouch timorously amid the leaves on the ground and the reporter croaks the uncle and—say, *say*, I got it, this'll be something ab-so-tively new in these royal plot pictures, they make their getaway, after the fight, by airplane—probably they might cross the ocean to America, and the pilot drops dead, and the reporter has a secret wound that he has gallantly been concealing from the princess and he faints but the pilot has taught the king how to fly and he grabs the controls—"

"Can I fly, really?" gloated Terry.

"You cannot!" snapped his mother. "That part's doubled. Go on, Lilac!"

And Terry listened gloomily while Lilac led the boy king on to a climax in which he was kidnaped by New York gunmen and finally rescued by the reporter and the prime minister—whiskered, comic, but heroic.

"It's swell!" said Abraham Hamilton Granville.

"It'll be all right, I guess," said Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait.

"Oh, Lord!" said Wiggins the press agent.

And as for Terry Tait and the Tait mongrel, they said nothing at all, and said it vigorously.

While Castello Marino, the residence of the Benescoten Taits, was not so extensive as the mansion of Mr. Abraham Granville, it was a very tasty residence, with a campanile that was an exact copy of the celebrated Mangia tower at Siena, except that it was only

one fifth as tall, and composed of yellow tiles instead of rusty old-fashioned brick.

In this select abode, the loving but unfortunate parents, trying so hard to give their little boy a chance to get on in the world, were having a good deal of trouble.

This morning Terry simply would not let his nice valet dress him. He said he did not like his nice valet. He said he wanted to be let alone.

"I think, Polacci," Mrs. Tait remarked to the valet, "that Master Tait ought to wear his polo suit to Mr. Granville's office."

"Oh, no, please, Mother!" Terry begged. "It looks so foolish! No other boy wears polo costume."

"Of course not! That's why I got it for you!"

"I won't wear it! Not outside the house. Everybody laughs at me. If I wear it, I won't act."

"Oh, dear me, why I should be cursed by a son that—"

"Now put on your polo rags and mind your mother," said T. Benescoten Tait.

"Rabbit!"

"Yes, my dear?"

"Shut up! . . . Now, Terry, I'll let you wear your sailor suit. The English one. Imported. But I want you to realize that your disobedience just almost breaks your mother's heart! Now hurry and let Polacci dress you. The limousine is waiting."

"Oh, Mother, please, have I got to go in the limousine? It isn't any fun to ride in a limousine. You can't see anything. I want to go on the trolley. You can see all kinds of different people on the trolley."

"Why, Terence McGee Tait! I never *heard* of such a thing! Who in the world has been talking to you about trolleys? They're common! There's just common vulgar folks, on trolleys! Besides! Give people a chance to look at you without paying for it? What an idea! Oh, dear, that's what comes from mixing with these extra people on the lot, picking up these common ideas! If you don't come with me in the limousine, I won't give you one bit of caviar for dinner!"

"I hate caviar!"

"Oh, I just don't know what I've done to deserve this!"

T. Benescoten spoke tentatively: "How about me and Terry

going on the trolley and meeting you at Abe's? I'd kind of like to ride on the streetcar myself, for a change."

"And pick up one of those Hollywood cuties? Not a chance!"

They took the limousine.

In Mr. Granville's office were gathered the higher nobility of the Jupiter-Triumph-Tait organization, to listen to the completed scenario of *His Majesty, Junior*, the film suggested three weeks ago by Lilac Lavery Lugg. But before Miss Lugg had a chance to read it, Wiggins, the press agent, prowling up and down in the ecstasy of an idea as he talked, announced that the evening newspapers said young Maximilian III of Slovaria, with his mother, Queen Sidonie, was about to visit London.

It was hinted in the papers that the astute Sidonie wanted to secure the sympathy and alliance of the British people by exhibiting the boy king.

"And here," squealed Wiggins, "is the grandest piece of publicity that's ever been pulled. Bessie, you and Tom and Terry go to London. I'll stay out of it, so they won't smell a mice. Clapham, our London agent, is a smart publicity grabber, anyway. You fix it, somehow, so Terry and this King Maximilian get acquainted. The two boy kings, see? They get photographed together, see? Besides, Terry's public know him as a common newsboy, and they won't hardly be loyal to him as a king unless they see him really mixing up with the elite, see?"

Mrs. Tait looked doubtful. Poppy Peaks she knew, and Hollywood was her oyster, but neither she nor T. Benescoten nor Terry had ever tackled the dread unknown lands beyond the Atlantic. But she brightened and looked resolute as Wiggins cunningly added:

"And this will give you a chance, if you rig it right and the two kids hit it off together, to get chummy with Queen Sidonie, Bessie, and maybe you can get her to come to the Peaks as your guest, and then, believe me, you'll make Garbo and Kate Hepburn look like deuces wild, very wild!"

"That's not a *bad* idea," mused Mrs. Tait.

In the sacred recesses of the Benescoten Tait home, in the Etruscan breakfast room, where love birds and Himalayan canaries billed and cooed and caroled in red enameled cages, and the solid-marble dining table glowed prettily with nineteen dollars' worth of

orchids, the Tait family discussed the invasion of Europe. They had just returned from Mr. Granville's office, where they had accepted Lilac's scenario of *His Majesty, Junior*.

"I think," said T. Benescoten, "that if we get held up in London very long, I'll run over to Paris, if you don't mind, Bessie."

"What do you want to do in Paris?"

"Huh? Why, I just want to see the city. You know, get acquainted with French customs. Nothing so broadening as travel."

"Then I guess you're going to stay narrow. Fat chance, you going to Paris by yourself and drinking a lot of hootch and chasing around after a lot of wild women. In fact, come to think of it, Rabbit, I guess Terry and I can pull this off better if we leave you home."

"Mother!" Terry was imploring. "Please! I want Father to go along!"

Bessie faced her two men with her hands on her hips, her jaw out, and when she stood thus, no one who knew her opposed her, unless he was looking for death.

T. Benescoten grumbled, Terry wailed, but Bessie glared them down. Then she stalked to the telephone and ordered the immediate attendance of a dressmaker, a women's tailor, a shoemaker, a milliner, a hairdresser, a masseuse, an osteopath, a French tutor and a Higher Thought lecturer.

"I'm going to Europe and I'm going right," she said.

When, two weeks later, she took the train, she had fourteen new evening frocks, eight new ensembles, thirty-seven new hats, eight new pairs of snakeskin shoes, a thumb ring of opals, a gold-mounted dressing bag, and a lovely new calm manner purchased from the Higher Thought lecturer.

All the way from Poppy Peaks to New York, Terry and his smiling, his tender mother were hailed by the millions to whom Terry had become the symbol of joyous yet wistful boyhood.

Wiggins had generously let the press of each city and town through which they would pass know just when the King of Boy Comedians would arrive, and at every stop Terry was dragged, wailing, to bow and smile his famous Little Lord Fauntleroy smile at the cheering gangs.

The horror of facing the staring eyes, the horror of trying to look superhuman for the benefit of these gloating worshipers, while

he felt within like a lonely and scared little boy, so grew on Terry that it was only his mother's raging, only the fury of Mr. Abraham Hamilton Granville and the coaxing of Wiggins, that would draw Terry out of his safe drawing room to the platform.

Despite a certain apprehension about the perils of the deep, despite a slight worry as to how he would talk to King Maximilian—who was, said the papers, to arrive in London one day before the Taits were due—Terry was delighted when Wiggins and Granville had left them, when the steamer had snarled its way out to sea, and he could hide in a corner of the *S. S. Megalomaniac's* royal suite.

He slept for sixteen hours, then, and even the indomitable Bessie Tait slept, while the *S. S. Megalomaniac* thrust out to sea, and expectant Europe awaited them as it awaited the other royal family from Slovaria.

Aside from gently persuading Terry to be the star in the ship's concert, at which he recited "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and "Gunga Din," and gave imitations of Napoleon and a sitting hen; aside from permitting him to be photographed by every passenger aboard, and lovingly insisting that he wear a new costume every afternoon—including the polo costume, the baseball suit, the Eton suit with top hat, and the Fauntleroy black velvet with lace collar—aside from these lighter diversions, Bessie gave Terry a rest on the crossing. He must be saved to overwhelm London, Britain, and Queen Sidonie.

Bessie was disappointed in landing at Southampton when she saw no crowd hysterical with desire to worship the King of Boy Comedians.

In fact, no one was awaiting them save Mr. Percival S. F. Clapham, press agent and secretary to the chairman of the Anglo-Jupiter Film Distributing Corporation, which acted as missionary in introducing the Terrytaits to Britain.

Mr. Clapham greeted Bessie and Terry in what he considered American: "Pleased to meet you! At your service, folks, as long as you're here."

"Where's the crowd?" demanded Bessie.

"They, uh—Southampton is a bit indifferent to Americans, you might say."

Bessie and Clapham looked at each other with no great affection. The international brotherhood was not working out; the hands across the sea were growing cold; and when the three of them were settled in a railway compartment, Bessie demanded crisply:

"Terry and I can't waste a lot of time. I don't want to hustle you, but have you fixed it up yet for Terry to meet this kid king and the quince?"

"The *quince*?"

"Good heavens! The queen! Sidonie!"

"But—the *quince*! Really! Oh, I see! The queen! Of course. I see. No, I'm sorry; not quite arranged yet."

"They've arrived?"

"Oh, yes, quite. Splendid reception. The young king the darling of London."

"Well, all right; then Terry and I can go right up and call on 'em. I expect they've seen a lot of his pictures. If you haven't made a date for us, I guess we'd better just send in our cards. Or had we better phone? Where they staying?"

"They're at the Picardie Hotel, because of being in mourning. This is an unofficial visit. And really, my dear lady, it would be quite impossible for you even to try to call on His Young Majesty and Queen Sidonie! It simply isn't done, d'you see? It isn't *done*! You must make application to your ambassador, who will present the request to the British foreign office, who will communicate with the Slovarian foreign office, who will determine whether or not they care to submit the request to Queen Sidonie's secretary, who may care to bring the matter to Her Majesty's attention, at which time—"

"At which time," remarked Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait, "hell will have frozen over a second time. Now listen! I'm not much up on meeting queens, but I guess I'm about as chummy with the royalty as you are! Now listen—"

Mr. Clapham's native ruddiness paled as he heard the subversive, the almost sacrilegious plans of Bessie Tait.

"My dear madame, we are all of us eager to help you," he implored, "but really, you know, a king is a king!"

She looked at Terry. "You bet," she observed. "And a king's mother is a queen. You bet!"

Which profound and mysterious statement puzzled Mr. Clapham until the train drew in at Waterloo.

There were five reporters and a group of thirty or forty admirers, very juvenile, to greet them. The most respectable Mr. Turner, chairman of the Anglo-Jupiter Corporation and boss of Mr. Clapham, met them with his car.

"Shall we go right to the Picardie, or kind of parade through London first?" demanded Bessie.

"Oh! The Picardie!"

"Why, sure! That's where King Maximilian and his ma are staying, isn't it? It's the swellest hotel in town, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, quite!" Mr. Turner looked agitated, as he fretted: "But I say! A lady traveling alone, with a boy, couldn't go to the Picardie! People might think it a bit fast! I've taken a suite for you at Garborough's Hotel—most respectable family hotel."

"When was it built?"

"Built? Built? When was it built? Good heavens, I don't know, madame. I should suppose about 1840."

"Well, that's all I want to know. But go ahead."

Mr. Turner's car left the station to a slight rustle of cheering from Terry's youthful admirers and to earnest questions from the reporters as to how many cocktails American boys of ten usually consume before dinner. But after that, there was no sign that London knew it was entertaining another king.

Fog packed in about them. The sooty house fronts disappeared in saffron-gray. The roar of Trafalgar Square seemed louder, more menacing, than Los Angeles or even New York. Bessie thrust out her hand with a gesture of timid affection which she rarely used toward that rare and golden goose, Terry.

The living room of their suite at Garborough's Hotel was brown and dingy. To Bessie, accustomed to hotel rooms the size of a railroad terminal, the room was shockingly small. It was but little bigger than the entire cottage she had occupied four years before.

She sniffed. And quite rightly.

And the bedrooms had wardrobes instead of proper closets.

She sniffed again. She rang for the room waiter.

"Dry Martini," said Bessie.

"Eek?" gasped the room waiter.

"Dry Martini! Cocktail! Licker!" snarled Bessie.

"I beg pardon, madame, but we do not serve cocktails."

"You don't—" In the hurt astonishment of it Bessie sat down,

hard. "Say, what kind of a dump is this? What kind of a bunch do you get here?"

"His Grace, the Duke of Ightham, has been coming here for sixty years."

"Ever since you were a boy of forty! All right, bring me a highball."

"A high ball, madame?"

"A highball! A whisky and soda! A lightning and cloudburst!"

"Very well, madame."

After the waiter's stately exit, Bessie whimpered, "And they said I'd like these old ruins!"

For the moment she looked beaten. "Maybe it ain't going to be as easy to be buddies with Maximilian and Sidonie as I thought. I wish I'd brought old Rabbit!" Her depression vanished; she sprang up like a war horse. "How I'd bawl him out! Come on, Bess! Here's where we show this old run-down Europe what an honest-to-goodness American lady can do!"

They had arrived at Garborough's at three of the afternoon. At five, in a black velvet costume which made her look like a vamp—as far up as her chin—Bessie was stalking into the lobby of the Hotel Picardie.

The reception clerk at Garborough's had been a stringy young woman in black alpaca and a state of disapproval, but at the Picardie he was a young Spanish count in a morning coat.

"I want," she said, "the best suite you have."

"Certainly, madame; at once."

The clerk leaped into action and brought out from a glass-enclosed holy of holies an assistant manager who was more dapperly mustached, more sleekly frock-coated, more soapily attentive than himself.

"May I inquire how large a suite Madame would desire? And—uh—is Madame's husband with Madame?"

"No. I'm the mother of Terry Tait, the movie, I mean cinema, star. I'm here with him; just us two. I'd like a parlor and couple of bedrooms and a few private dining rooms. I guess you need references here." For a second Bessie again sounded a little hopeless. "Probably if you called up the American ambassador he would know about us."

"Oh, no, madame; of course we are familiar with the pictures of Master Tait. May I show you some suites?"

The first suite that he showed was almost as large, it had almost as much gilt, paneling, omelet-marble table tops, telephone extensions, water taps and Persian rugs as a hotel in Spokane, Schenectady, or St. Petersburg, Florida.

"This is more like it. But look here, I heard somewhere that Queen Sidonie and her boy are staying here."

"Yes, quite so, madame."

"Well, look: I'd like to be on their floor."

"Sorry, madame, but that is impossible. We have reserved the entire floor for Their Majesties and their suite."

"But there must be some rooms empty on it."

"Sorry, madame, but that is quite impossible. The police would be very nasty if we even attempted such a thing."

Bessie unhappily recalled the days when she had first gone to Hollywood with Terry and tried to persuade a castiron-faced guard to let them through to the casting director. Not since then had anyone spoken to her so firmly. It was a dejected Bessie Tait from Mechanicville who besought, "Well, then, I'd like to be on the floor right above them or below them. I'll make it worth your while, manager. Oh, I know I can't bribe you, but I don't like to bother anybody without I pay for their trouble, and it would be worth ten of your pounds, or whatever you callum, to have a nice suite just above Their Majesties."

The assistant manager hesitated. From her gold-link purse Bessie drew out the edge of a ten-pound note. At that beautiful sight the assistant manager sighed, and murmured respectfully, "I'll see what can be done, madame."

Ten minutes later Bessie had a voluptuous suite guaranteed to be just above that of Queen Sidonie.

Someone had informed Bessie Tait that English people dined as late as eight in the evening. It scarcely seemed possible. But, "I'll try anything once," said Bessie.

At eight, she sat in a corner of the Renaissance Salon of the Hotel Picardie, in a striking white tulle frock with gold sequins, and with her was Master Tait, in full evening clothes.

She noticed that the other guests stared at him considerably.

"They know who we are!" she rejoiced, as she picked up the menu. It was in French, but if the supercilious captain of waiters expected the American lady not to understand French, he was

mistaken, for in eighteen lessons at Poppy Peaks she had learned not only the vocabulary of food but also the French for "I should like to take a horseback ride on a horse tomorrow," "How much costs a hat of this fashion?" and "Where obtains one the tickets of the first class for Holland?"

She said rapidly to the captain, "*Donnynma deh pottage German one order crevettes and one wheats, deh rosbifs, pom de terres, and some poissons—no, pois—and deh fois ice cream and hustle it will you, please?*"

"*Perfaitment!*" said the French captain and, continuing in his delightful native tongue, he commanded a waiter, "*Jetz mach' schnell, du, Ottol!*"

At nine, Bessie commanded again the presence of the assistant manager who had found her suite.

"I want you," she suggested, "to get me some good English servants. First I want a valet for my son. I want Terry should have a high-class English valet—and I don't want none that talks bad English, neither."

"Certainly, madame."

"And I want a maid that can fix my hair."

"Certainly, madame."

"And then I want a refined lady secretary."

"Refined?"

"Yes, she's gotta be refined. I never could stand dames that aren't refined."

"I know a young lady, madame, Miss Tingle, the daughter of a most worthy Low Church clergyman, and formerly secretary to Lady Frisbie."

"Lady Frisbie? Oh, in the nobility?"

"Why—uh—practically. Her husband, Sir Edward Frisbie, was a linen draper, and mayor of Bournemouth. Oh, yes, you'll find Miss Tingle most refined."

"Grand! That's what I'm always telling these roughnecks in Hollywood—like when they wanted Terry to play a comic part, bellboy in a harem—'No, sir,' I said, 'Terry's got a refined father and mother, and he'll be refined himself or I'll bust his head!' Well, shoot in your valet and maid and Miss Tingle—have 'em here by noon."

The assistant manager promised. After his going, Bessie received

Mr. Turner and Mr. Clapham of the Anglo-Jupiter Corporation.

"We have decided—" said Mr. Clapham gently.

"Yes, we have quite decided," said Mr. Turner with firmness.

"—that it would be indiscreet for you to seek an audience with King Maximilian at all."

"Oh, you have!" murmured Bessie. "It's nice to have things decided for you."

"Yes, we hoped you would be pleased. We have, in fact, gone into the matter most thoroughly. I rang up a gentleman connected with the press, and he assured me that the proper way would be for you to apply to your ambassador, and that doubtless the matter could be arranged in a year or two—doubtless you would have to go to Slovaria."

"Well, that's splendid. Just a year or two! That's fine! Mighty kind of you."

"So pleased to do any little thing that I can. Now Mr. Turner and I have talked it over, and it seems to both of us that it would be better to have a little subtler publicity. So if you care to have him do so, your son will address the Lads' Brigade of St. Crispin's, Golder's Green, next Thursday evening—the papers will give several paragraphs to this interesting occasion. And then—I do a bit in the literary way, you know—I have ventured to write an interview with you which I hope to have used by one of the papers. It goes as follows:

"Well, I swow! Say, dod gast my cats, this yere is by gosh all whillikens one big burg,' was the first remark of Mrs. Tait, mother of the well-known juvenile cinema star, Terry Tait, upon arrival in London yesterday. 'Yes-sir-ree-bob,' she continued, 'out thar in the broad bosom of the Golden West, out where the handclasp grows a little warmer, we get some mighty cute burgs, but nothing like this yere ant heap.'"

"Isn't that nice?" sighed Bessie. "And that's the American language you've written it in, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'm often taken for an American when I wish."

"I'm sure you must be."

Left alone by Turner and Clapham, with the promise that within a few days they would arrange other feats of publicity at least equal to the chance to address the Lads' Brigade of Golder's Green, Bessie sat down and sighed. But the next morning she

resolutely marched into Terry's modest 24 x 42 bedroom, where he was reading *Treasure Island*, and she ordered, "Come on, son; we're going out and buy the town. Toys."

"I don't want any toys. I hate toys!"

"You heard what I said! Think I'm going to have a lot of kings dropping into your room and seeing you without a lot of swell toys?"

"But Mother, I'd rather have books."

"Say, if you keep on like this, you'll turn out nothing but an author working for one-fifty a week. Books never did nobody no good. Come on!"

By suggestion of the concierge, they took a taxi for an enormous Toy Bazaar on Oxford Street. Bessie firmly bought for Terry an electric train, an electric Derby game, a portable chemical laboratory, a set of boxing gloves, and a choice article in the way of a model of the Colosseum in which electric lions devoured electric Early Christians.

"There! I bet none of these boy kings has got a better set of toys than that!" remarked Bessie.

As they emerged from the Toy Bazaar, Terry saw, next to it, an animal shop.

Ever since they had left Poppy Peaks, Terry had mourned for the disgraceful mongrel which the English quarantine regulations had compelled him to leave at home, and he cried now, "Oh, Mother, I want a dog!"

"If I get you one, will you play nicely with the electric toys?"

"I'll try; honestly I will."

"And will you address these Lad Brigands or whatever it is in this Golden Green or wherever it is? I'll have this bird Clapham write your speech."

"Yes. But a jolly dog!"

"I wish," said Bessie, in her most refined way, as they entered the animal shop, "to look at a line of dogs. What have you got good today?"

"This, madame, is a very superior animal." And the clerk brought out an object as thin as paper, as long as Saturday morning, as gloomy as a cameraman. "This is an Imperial Russian wolfhound, a genuine borzoi—you will recognize the typical borzoi touch, madame—it's brother of a hound which we sold just yesterday to

the Earl of Tweepers for his daughter, Lady Ann—no doubt you know her ladyship, madame.”

“H-how much?” faltered Bessie.

“To close out this line, madame, we should be willing to let you have this animal for a hundred guineas.”

The inner, the still Mechanicvillized Bessie Tait was calculating, “Great grief—that’s five hundred bucks for a pooch!” but the outer, the newly refined Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait was remarking evenly, “Rather a lot, but I might consider— Does it please you, Terry?”

She could keep up the strain of refinement no longer; and most briskly, much more happily, she remarked to the clerk, “This is my son, Terry Tait. You’ve probably seen him in the movies. They call him the King of Boy Comedians.”

“Oh, Mother, please!” protested Terry, but the clerk was trumpeting, “Oh, yes, madame. We are honored in being allowed to serve you.”

And with that the canine blotter would have been sold, but for one accident. Terry sighed, “Mother, I don’t like him.”

“But *darling*, this is the kind of dog that all nobility get their pictures taken with. But if you don’t like him—”

While Bessie grew momentarily more impatient, Terry was offered, and declined, such delightful pets as a Pekingese that looked like a misanthropic bug and an Airedale like a rolled-up doormat. Then he stopped before a cage and, his hands clasped in ecstasy, exulted, “Oh, there’s the dog I want!”

The clerk looked shocked; Bessie, seeing his expression, looked shockeder.

Terry’s choice was a canine social error. He was, probably, a cross between a police dog and a collie, with a little Scotch terrier and a trace of cocker spaniel. He had bright eyes, a wide and foolish mouth, and paws so enormous that he resembled a pup on snowshoes. And he had none of the dignity and aloof tolerance of the pedigreed dogs whom Terry had rejected; he laughed at them and wagged at them and barked an ill-bred joyful bark.

“That,” objected the clerk, “is a mongrel, I’m afraid. We are exhibiting him only out of deference to the widow of a country customer. I really shouldn’t care to recommend him.”

“But he’s a sweet dog!” wailed Terry. “He’s the one I want!”

“Very well, then, my fine young gentleman, you get no dog at

all, if you're going to be so doggone *common!*" raged Bessie, and she dragged the protesting Terry from the shop and hastened to the Hotel Picardie.

Bessie telephoned to those unseen powers that somewhere in the mysterious heart of every hotel regulate all human destinies, "Will you please send up a bellboy at once?"

"A bellboy? Oh, a page!"

"Well, whatever you want to call him."

There appeared at her suite a small boy whom she immediately longed to put on the stage. He was redheaded, freckle-faced, and he carried his snub nose high and cockily. He wore a skin-tight blue uniform with a row of brass buttons incredibly close together, and on the corner of his head rode an impudent pillbox cap of soldierly scarlet.

"Yes, madame?" He was obviously trying not to grin, in pure good fellowship, and when Terry grinned, the page's cockney mug was wreathed with smiling.

"What is your name?" demanded Bessie.

"Bundock, madame."

"Heavens, you can't call a person Bundock! What are you called at home?"

"Ginger, madame."

"Well, Ginger, this is my son, Master Terry Tait, the movie—the cinema star."

"Oh, madame, we were told below that Master Tait was 'ere, but I didn't know I'd 'ave the pleasure of seeing him! I'm familiar with Master Tait in the pictures, if I may say so, madame."

"All right. Play."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said play. Play! You are to play with Master Terry."

While Ginger looked dazed, she led the two boys into Terry's bedroom, pointed an imperial forefinger at the new toys which she had brought home in the taxicab, and loftily left them.

"Gosh, I think it's the limit that this playing business is wished onto you, too!" sighed Terry. "I guess she'll want us to play with the electric train. Do you mind playing with an electric train?"

"I've never before 'ad the opportunity, sir."

"Oh, golly, don't call me 'sir.'"

"Very well, sir."

"What did you play with at home?"

"Well, sir—"

"Terry! Not sir!"

"Well, Master Terry, sir, I 'ad a very nice cricket bat that my uncle 'Ennery made for me, and a wagon made out of a Bass' Ale box, sir, but it didn't go so very well, sir—permit me!"

Terry had begun to open the case containing the electric train. Ginger sprang to help him. As he lifted out an electric locomotive, a dozen railroad carriages which represented the Flying Scotsman in miniature, a station on whose platform a tiny station master waved a flag when the set was connected with the electric-light socket, a tunnel through a conveniently portable mountain, and an even more miraculously portable bridge across a mighty tin river three feet long, Ginger muttered, "I'll be jiggered."

"Do you like them?" marveled Terry.

"Oh! *Like* them, sir!"

"Well, you wouldn't if they gave you one every birthday and Christmas, and you had to run 'em while a bunch of gin-hounds stood around and watched you and said, 'Isn't he cute!' "

But Terry was impressed by the admiration of this obviously competent Ginger, this fortunate young man who was allowed to wear brass buttons and live in the joyous informality of kitchens and linen closets. Within fifteen minutes, unanimously elected president and general manager of the Hollywood & Pasadena R. R., Terry was excitedly giving orders to the vice president and traffic manager; trains were darting through tunnels and intelligently stopping at stations; and once there was a delightful accident in which the train ran off the curve, to the anguish of sixteen unfortunate passengers.

"Gee, I do like it when I've got somebody to play with!" marveled Terry. "Say, I wish you could see my dog back home. He's a dandy dog. His name is Corn Beef and Cabbage."

"Really, sir? What breed is 'e?"

"Well, he's kind of an Oklahoma wolfhound, my dad says."

"Oh, yes. Okaloma wolf'ound. I've 'eard of that breed, sir. I say! Let's put one of the passengers on the track, and then the train runs into 'im and we could 'ave a funeral."

"Slick!"

Miss Tingle, the refined lady secretary recommended by the hotel, had arrived at noon, and had been engaged.

"Can you go to work right now?" demanded Bessie. "I'm going to grab off a king!"

"Grab off—a king, madame?"

"Oh, gosh, I don't know why it is! Back in Hollywood, I thought I could sling the King's English all right, but in England, seems like every time I say anything they repeat what I say and register astonishment! I guess I'm kind of a lady Buffalo Bill. Well, let's get to it. Now listen."

She explained the scheme for the capture of publicity by making Terry and King Maximilian chums.

"And just between you and I, I wouldn't kick and holler much if I got to be buddies with Queen Sidonie. Of course Terry's publicity comes first. I just sacrifice everything to that boy. But same time I've seen pictures of Sidonie. Somehow I just feel (Do you believe in the Higher Thought?—you know there's a lot of these instincts and hunches and all like that that you just can't explain by material explanations)—and somehow I feel that she and I would be great pals, if we had the chance. Oh, dear!"

Bessie sighed the gentle sigh of a self-immolating mother.

"It's just fierce the way I've had to submerge my own personality for my husband and son. But I guess unselfishness never goes unrewarded. So look. We'll just write her a little letter and send it down by hand. Of course I want to enclose a card, so's she'll know whom I am. Which of these cards would do the trick better, do you think?"

One of the two cards was a highly restrained document: merely *Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait*, in engraved script. But the other card was baroque. It was impressive. It announced:

Mr. & Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait

Pop and Mom of

TERRY TAIT

The King of Boy Comedians

Star of "Kids Is Kids," "Wee Waifs o' Dockland,"

"A Child of the Midnight," etc.

Castello Marino

Poppy Peaks, Cal.

It was embossed in red, blue, silver, and canary-yellow, and while it was slightly smaller than a motor-license plate, it was much more striking.

"Now maybe this colored one ain't as society as the other, but don't you think Her Majesty would be more likely to notice it?" said Bessie anxiously.

Miss Tingle was terrified yet fascinated. "I've never," she gasped, "had the privilege of communicating with a queen, but if I may say so, I fancy the plainer card would be more suitable, madame."

"Oh, I suppose so. But the big card cost a lot of money. Well, now, will you take dictation on a letter? I suppose the old gal reads English?"

"Oh, I understand that Their Majesties write and speak six languages."

"Well, I'd be satisfied with one. When I get back home I'm going to hire some Britisher to learn me to talk snooty. Well, here goes. Take this down:

"Her Majesty, the Queen of Slovaria.

"Dear Madame:

"I guess you will be surprised at receiving this letter from a total stranger, but I am a neighbor of yours, having the suite right above yours here in the hotel. And probably you have heard of my son, Mr. Terry Tait, the well-known boy actor in the movies—no, make that cinema, Miss Tingle—and I hope that maybe your boy, King Maximilian, has seen him in some of his celebrated films, such as 'Please Buy a Paper,' or 'Give Me a Penny, Mister.'

"He is here with me in London, and every hour he says to me, 'Ma, I'm just crazy to meet this boy king, Maximilian, he being my own age, which is ten, etc.'"

"As your boy is a king, and as folks in many lands have been kind enough to call Terry the King of Boy Actors, I thought maybe it would be nice if the two could get together and compare notes, etc. I would be very pleased to give him and you lunch or tea or dinner or a cocktail or whatever would be convenient for you and though of course Terry has many dates, having to lecture to the Lads' Brigade, etc., we would try to keep any date that you might set.

"But I'm afraid we'll have to make it in the next few days, as Terry's Public in Paris is begging for him.

"So if you could just ring me up here in Suite Five-B any time that's handy for you, we can arrange details, etc.

"Hoping you are in the best of health, I am Yours sincerely.

"As soon as you get that typed—I've had 'em bring up a machine and stick it in my bedroom—get a bellboy to hustle it right down to Sid's suite. We gotta get action. Shoot!"

And Bessie scampered happily out to the foyer to hire a maid, and to engage for Terry a lugubrious valet.

His name was Humberstone. He had, of course, never served anyone of lesser degree than a duke, and he would require two pounds extra a week to associate with Americans. He got it. He was worth it. Even a boy king from Slovaria would be impressed by Humberstone's egg-shaped head.

Bessie proudly let this four-pounds-a-week worth of noble valet into the bedroom. On the floor, extremely linty, sat two small boys whom Humberstone eyed with malevolence. Ginger quaked. Terry looked irritated.

"Sonny dear, this is your new valet," crooned Bessie, with a maternal sweetness alarming to her well-trained son.

Humberstone eyed the railwaymen with the eye of an ogre who liked little boys nicely fried, with onion sauce. Under that smug glare, the first excited gayety that Terry had shown these many weeks died out.

"Oh, I don't need a valet, Mother!"

"And who, Master Smarty, do you think is going to look out for your clothes? You certainly don't expect me to, I hope! Humberstone, you can sleep here in this dressing room. Now get busy and press Master Terry's clothes."

When Humberstone had gone out with an armful of clothes and when Bessie had left them, the two playmates sat on a couch, too dispirited to go on happily wrecking trains.

"Gee, that's fierce, that man-eating valet," confided Terry.

"Right you are. 'E's 'orrible," said his friend Ginger.

"He's a big stiff!"

"'E is that! 'E's an old buffins."

"It's fierce, Ginger. We won't stand it!"

"It is that, Terry. We won't!"

"We'll run away. To Poppy Peaks!"

"Is that your ranch?"

Now when Terry comes to Heaven's gate and has to explain to Saint Peter the extreme untruth of what he said about bears and the wild free life of the ranches, let us trust that the wise old saint will understand that Terry had long been overadmired for

silly things like having cherubic lips and silky hair, and never been admired for the proper things, such as the ability to ride mustangs, lasso steers and shoot Indians, which, unquestionably, he would have demonstrated if only he had ever been nearer a ranch than Main Street, Los Angeles.

"Yes, sure it's our ranch. Gee, I'm going to get Mother to invite you there. We live in a big log cabin, and every night, gee, you can hear the grizzly bears howling!"

"My word! I say, did you ever shoot a grizzly bear?"

"Oh, not awful many, but couple of times."

"Tell me about it. Were you with Will Rogers or Hoot Gibson?"

"Both of them. There was Bill and Hoot and Doug Fairbanks and—uh—and there was Will Beebe, the nachalist, and we all went up camping in the—uh—in the Little Bighorn Valley—that's on our ranch, Poppy Peaks—and one night I was sleeping out in the sagebrush, all rolled up in my blankets, and I woke up and I heard something going snuffle-snuffle-snuffle, and I looked up and there was a great, big, tall, huge figger—"

"My 'at!"

"—just like a great, big, enormous man, only twic't as big, and like he had an awful' thick fur coat, and gee, I was scared, but I reached out my hand and I grabbed my dad's rifle, and I aimed—I just took a long careful aim—"

"My word!"

"—and I let her go, *bang!* and the bear he fell—no, at first he didn't fall right down dead, but he kind of staggered like he was making for me—"

"My aunt!"

"—but my shot'd woke up everybody, and Harold Lloyd, no, Richard Bart'lemess it was—he grabbed up his gun and he shot and the bear fell down right beside me, with its awful hot breath stirring my hair, and then it just flopped a couple of times and *bing!* it was dead!"

"My!"

"But I bet you've had some adventures, Ginger. Don't all English kids go to sea as cabin boys?"

"Well, me, I never 'ad time to, not exactly. But me uncle, Uncle 'Ennery Bundock, now there's a man, Terry, that's after your own 'eart. Adventures? Why, Uncle 'Ennery 'as 'ad more adventures than the Prince of Wales! 'E was a cabin boy, 'e was!

Why, one time 'e was out in the South Seas and the ship 'e was on was wrecked, it was, it ran into a w'ale, a monstrous big w'ale, and it busted the forward keelson, and that wessel, it began to sink immejitly, oh, something shocking, and me uncle swam ashore, four miles it was, through them seas simply infected with sharks, and 'e come ashore, only me own age, twelve, 'e was then, but many's the time 'e's told me, six foot 'e stood in 'is stocking feet.

"And there on shore was a fee-rocious band of nekked savages but—well 'e 'ad a burning glass in 'is clothes, and 'e 'eld it up, and them poor ignorant savages, they didn't know what it was, and then 'e acted like 'e didn't even see 'em, and 'e stuck that burning glass over a pile of driftwood, and the wood caught fire, and them savages all gave one 'orrible shriek, and they all ran away, and so that's 'ow 'e got to be their king."

"Is he still their king?"

"'Im? Uncle 'Ennery? No fear! 'E 'ad other things to do, 'e 'ad, and when 'e got tired of being king, 'e up and made 'isself a canoe out of a log and sailed away and—and 'e stood for Parliament in the Sandwich Islands!"

"Tell me some more!" cried Terry.

But their ardor was interrupted by the return of the formidable Humberstone, and then Bessie whisked in with, "You can go now, Ginger. Terry! Wash your hands. Lunch."

"Mother! I want Ginger to come play with me every day!"

"Well, perhaps; we'll see. Now be snappy. This afternoon we might—we might have some important visitors. Most important!"

For two days Bessie awaited a reply to her note to Queen Sidonie, but from the royal fastnesses she had no murmur.

London mildly discovered that the King of Boy Comedians was in town. A special writer from a newspaper which had been Americanized came to interview Terry on the contrasting spiritual values of baseball vs. cricket, his favorite poem, and the cooking of Brussels sprouts.

He addressed the Lads' Brigade, and that was nothing to write about. And he received six hundred and eighteen letters from people who were willing to let him pay for their mortgages and their surgical operations.

But for most of the two days he sneaked into corners and tried to look inconspicuous while, in the living room of the suite, Bessie

stalked and glared, and in his bedroom Humberstone the valet glared and stalked. Ginger was summoned to play, but Bessie so raged at their noise that the two infants made a pirates' den behind Terry's bed, where Ginger chronicled his uncle 'Ennery Bundock's adventures as steward and bartender to a celebrated arctic expedition—" 'Bring me a whisky-soda, me man,' says Sir John Peary, and Uncle 'Ennery brings it, and standing there Sir John drinks a toast to the North Pole, and 'e says to me uncle, ' 'Ennery, we'd never've discovered it but for your splendid service' "—and 'Ennery's astonishing experiences during the Great War when, as a British spy, he reached the Imperial Palace in Berlin and talked with the Kaiser, who, such was Uncle 'Ennery's cunning, took him for a Turkish ally.

If anything more than Ginger's freckled grin had been needed to make Terry adore him, it would have been the privilege of meeting the relative of so spirited a hero as Uncle 'Ennery Bundock.

With Terry in Ginger's care, Bessie was able to give herself up wholeheartedly to worrying about failure to receive an answer from Queen Sidonie, to worrying about what Rabbit might be doing by his lone wicked self in Hollywood, and to being manicured, massaged, dress-fitted, hat-fitted, and generally enjoying herself. On the afternoon of the second day, she fretted only a little when Terry, with Ginger, seemed to be missing. But when they had been missing for two hours, she realized with sudden horror that Terry was lost in the wilds.

It was some comfort to think that there would be front-page stories even in the London papers, which have their first pages on the third page, but she did hope he wouldn't be late for dinner. With all the devotion of a mother and the efficiency of a true American, she telephoned first to the newspapers and second to Scotland Yard.

Just as the happy reporters and cameramen arrived, she heard a slight squealing back in Terry's room and dashed out to find that Terry had sheepishly sneaked in the back way, accompanied by a yet more sheepish Ginger and by a very sheep of sheeps—a large irregular-shaped dog of a predominating hue of brown, streaked and striped and spotted with black, white, yellow, and plain dirt. He had a broad back, built for boys to ride upon, a tail that wagged foolishly, and an eye that looked with fond

ecstasy upon the two boys, but with alarm upon the ineffable Humberstone.

"Good heavens!" wailed Bessie. "That's that horrible animal I told you you couldn't have!"

"Oh, no, Mother! *That*"—with vast scorn—"was just a collie-police-dog, with terrier blood, but this is a pure-bred Margate Wader. The man *said* so! And his name is Josephus. The dog's. And the man wanted to charge me ten shillings, but Ginger got him for me for eighteen-pence and that autographed picture of Fred Stone."

"Oh," groaned Bessie, "to think that I should have a son that's common! It's funny, but you're just like your father. But I haven't got time to talk about that now. Listen! The reporters are here! You were lost! You gotta tell 'em—a man tried to kidnap you, but Ginger—he'd happened to see you once in the hotel, and of course he knew who you were, and he was coming along, and he persuaded you not to go with this man—he looked like a Bolshevik. Get that? Snappy now!"

With maternal pride, she heard Terry admit to the reporters how reckless he had been in wandering through the foggy city. Ginger, called on for further details, loyally brought in his uncle 'Ennery Bundock—it seemed that Uncle 'Ennery Bundock had once served in the Czar's Imperial Guard, and was an authority on Bolsheviks; it was he who had recognized the Soviet spy and rescued Terry.

The reporters raised their eyebrows and went away, most politely. Next morning, Bessie was up at seven, clamoring for all the newspapers. Terry's awful escape was mentioned in only one of them, in the column of Mr. Swannen Haffer:

After, so it is asserted, frequently associating with gunmen and like underworld characters of San Francisco, Bangor, and other western cities of the United States, Terence Tate, the American boy cinema actor, discovered that Brighter London is delightfully beginning to realize the perils of his native land. Strolling from his hotel yesterday, Master Tate, whose mother has interestingly compared his art to that of Sir Henry Irving, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, and Eleonora Duse, contrived so thoroughly to lose himself in the trackless wilds of Pall Mall

that it was necessary to send out an expedition of hotel servants, equipped with wireless, ice axes, and tinned walrus meat, to discover and rescue him.

Master Tate, with that shrewd perception which has so endeared all Yankee filmaturgy to the naïve British heart, discovered a band of red Indians encamped in front of the Carlton Club, and a band of Bolshevik spies, disguised as bishops but concealing bombs under their aprons, lurking on the roof of the Athenaeum. Master Tate's horrendous discoveries have been conveyed to Scotland Yard, and it is to be hoped that thanks to the young hero—who is only six years old; in fact, so young that his mother permits him to have only three motor cars—London will presently be made almost as safe as his native Chicago.

Bessie spoke for half an hour without stopping. It did not soothe her particularly to find, in every newspaper, a two-column account of the children's party given by the little Princess Elizabeth, with King Maximilian of Slovaria as honor guest, and the announcement that within a week Sidonie and Maximilian were to accompany the British Royal Family to Sandringham Hall, in Norfolk.

The house party, said the announcement, would be informal, and limited to intimate friends of the Family.

Somehow—she could not explain why—that seemed to Bessie Tait, of Poppy Peaks, to shut her out more than any account of a grand public entertainment.

A week! She was desperate.

And if the British press wasn't to be roused by Terry's ghastly kidnaping, what could a lady do? All day she galloped up and down her suite, raging at her maid, at Humberstone, even at Miss Tingle, the refined lady secretary. The cheerful sounds of Terry, Ginger, and Josephus the Margate Wader, from Terry's room, the sound of yelps and giggles and tremendous chasings after a tennis ball, irritated her the more; made her forget the small voice within her that whispered, "Now be careful, Bess—don't monkey with the buzz saw."

"Oh, shut up!" she said to the alarmed mentor and, sending Miss Tingle to buy stationery which she didn't need, the maid to buy

hair nets which she never used, and Humberstone to go back to his room and continue doing nothing save look impressive, she dashed to the telephone and snarled, "I want to speak to Suite Four-B."

"I'm sorry, madame, but I can't connect you with that apartment. It's taken by the Queen of Slovaria."

"Good Lord, don't you suppose I know that? The Queen and I are great friends."

"Very sorry, madame, but I have my orders. I can connect you with the bureau of Count Elopatak, Her Majesty's equerry."

Bessie was puzzled as to why one should be connected telephonically with a bureau, an object which to her was firmly associated with Mr. Rabbit Tait's collars and pink silk undergarments, and equally puzzled as to what an equerry did for a living. "Sounds like a horse—and at that, I guess a horse is about the only bird connected with Her Maj that I'm going to get to talk to," she reflected tragically, but she said meekly, "Very well, I'll speak to his countship."

She then spoke in turn, so far as she could later make out, with an American who was breeches buyer for Eglantine, Katz and Kominsky, of Cleveland, Ohio, and who seemed to have no connection whatever with the Royal House of Slovaria; with an Englishwoman who appeared to be the stenographer to the secretary of the equerry; to the secretary of the equerry; to an indignant Englishman who asserted that he was no Slovarian equerry but, on the contrary, a coffee planter from British Guiana; to Count Elopatak, and at last to a man with a swart and bearded voice who admitted to being the secretary of Queen Sidonie.

But he didn't seem to care for telephoning. He kept making sounds as though he were about to hang up, and Bessie held him only by a string of such ejaculations as, "Now you must get this clear!" and "This is very important!"

Hadn't Her Majesty, Bessie demanded, received the letter from Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait, of California, mother of the celebrated—

Yes, the secretary seemed to remember some such letter but of course letters from strangers were never considered.

Well, then, she was willing to take the matter up over the phone.

Take up *what* matter? There were no matters, thank heaven, which had to be taken up!

But had they asked His Young Majesty whether he might not like to meet the celebrated boy—

His Majesty cared to meet no one and really, if Madame would be so kind, there were innumerable affairs of the most pressing necessity and—click!

This time Bessie expressed her opinion in a subdued manner. "But I'm not licked yet. I've got an Idea!"

When Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait had an Idea, Hollywood sat up and looked nervous, but the gray welter of city beyond the windows of the Hotel Picardie looked strangely indifferent.

"Of course, none of her hired men—equerries or whatever fancy names they want to call themselves—would understand it, but I'll bet Sidonie herself would be tickled pink to get some high-class publicity! It's just a matter of getting to her and explaining it," considered Bessie. "And we'd have such a nice time talking about our boys. Well, then, on the job—get past all these darn watchdogs."

She marched into Terry's bedroom. She chased Ginger out of the room, shut Josephus the Margate Wader in Humberstone's room, and remarked to Terry with a maternal sweetness which caused him to look alarmed and suspicious, "Come, my little mannie, put on your Fauntleroy suit; we're going to see Queen Sidonie!"

Now deep and dark and terrible as was Terry's hatred for the polo costume, it was as love and loyalty compared with his detestation of the Little Lord Fauntleroy suit, with its velvet jacket, velvet breeches, buckled slippers and lace collar. He protested. He wailed, while from beyond the door Josephus wailed with him—and furiously started to chew Humberstone's respectable slippers.

With a considerable drop in tenderness, Bessie snarled, "Now, we'll have no more out of you! Good Lord! I work myself to the bone trying to give you a chance in life! I work and slave to have you meet the real *bon ton*, like kings and queens, and not a lot of these Hollywood bums, and then you won't act nice like I tell you to! Terry Tait, I haven't punished you for some time, but unless you put on the nice Fauntleroy suit, and act nice and gentlemanly, why, I'll just nachly snatch you baldheaded, jhear me?"

In the case of Mr. Rabbit Benescoten Tait, Terry had seen his mother's rare ability to snatch people baldheaded and, sobbing

slightly, he took off the honest boy-town tweed suit he was wearing and began to force himself into the abomination of lace and black velvet.

Out of the door, down the corridor, about to meet a queen—about to meet the first woman who might prove to be her own equal—marched Mrs. T. Benescoten Tait.

Bessie had, in a week of London, learned that really cultured and cosmopolitan people called candy "sweets," called trolley cars "trams," called hotel clerks "reception clerks," called six bits "three bob," and, most especially, called an elevator a "lift." Thus it was no common and uneducated elevator but an exotic lift that they took, and it was to a lift attendant that Bessie murmured charmingly, with just a touch of a Mechanicville French accent, "We'll stop at the *catriem étage*—oh, how fonny!—I mean the fourt' floor, please."

"Very sorry, madame, but that floor is reserved. I am not permitted to stop there."

"Say, don't you suppose I know it's reserved for the Slovarian royal party? It's them I'm going to see!"

The lift attendant had stopped the lift (or elevator or *ascenseur*) just below the fourth floor. He was a bright lift boy of sixty-five. He said unhappily, "I'm sorry, madame, but I'm not permitted to let anyone off on the fourth floor unless they are recognized or are accompanied by someone from the royal entourage."

"Rats! I tell you they're expecting me! Look at this!"

This was a pound note. The lift attendant looked on it regretfully, but he sighed. "Very sorry, madame—much as my position is worth," and shot the lift down to the ground floor.

"All right, then; you can take us back to the fifth floor," said Bessie.

Terry turned toward their suite, but his mother snapped, "Where do you think you're going?" and marched him toward the onyx-and-crystal front staircase from their floor down to the fourth, the royal floor.

As they elegantly emerged on the sacred corridor, they were confronted by one of the largest, tallest, most ruddy-faced bobbies in the entire British police force. He too was sorry, and he too explained that he could not let strangers approach Their Majesties.

Bessie wasted no words on so rude a fellow. She marched upstairs again. "If they think they can stop *me*! There's nothing I won't do for the sake of my poor little son!" she moaned and, grabbing the poor little son, she marched him to the east end of their corridor.

Now at the east end Bessie had noted a flight of slate-tread stairs, presumably intended for servants and as a fire escape.

At the foot of the stairs stood the same bobby whom she had just met.

"Now then! 'Ave I got to run you in?" he growled.

With one proud glance she marched back upstairs.

For half an hour she cried on her bed, raging at the tyrants who insulted a mother who was trying to give her son a chance to get along in the world. Then she rose, powdered, and stalked into Terry's room, where he had already changed from the nice Fauntleroy suit into khaki shirt and shorts. He sat behind a couch, arguing with Josephus.

"Now look here, young man, I'm going out, and if you stir one foot out of this suite, you and me will have a little talk this evening, jhear me!"

She marched out, singularly like the Fifth Cavalry on the trail of the Apaches.

Terry telephoned for Ginger. In blessed quiet and lack of maternal care, the two small boys and the one large dog became happy again. Liberally interpreting the boundaries of the suite, which Terry was not to leave, as including the corridor, they laid out the electric railway from Edinburgh (opposite Room 597) to South Africa (overlooking the canyon of the back stairs).

And while they reveled, Bessie was at the American Embassy, successively failing to see the ambassador, the counselor, the first and second secretaries, and finally, with indignation at this neglect of her Rights as an American Citizen, hearing the third secretary murmur:

"I greatly sympathize with you, but I'm afraid it would be hard to get the chief to feel that you have been insulted and that the State Department ought to cable Slovaria. Suppose some complete stranger were to come to your studio in Hollywood while Terry was making the most important scenes of a new picture, and should want to go right in—would he be admitted?"

"But that's entirely different! Terry isn't a stranger!"

"But he might be to the Slovarians."

"Well, I've heard a lot about how ignorant these Europeans are, but you can't make me believe that even the Slovarians haven't heard about Terry Tait, the King of Boy Comedians!"

The third secretary rose with a manner which was familiar to Bessie from her first job-hunting days in Los Angeles. He observed silkily, "Dreadfully sorry, but I'm afraid we can't do a thing in this matter. But if we can help you about passports . . ."

As Bessie walked disconsolately away from the Embassy she groaned, "I guess the game's up! We ain't going to meet any queen. My poor little boy! They won't raise him to four grand a week, after all. And I won't be able to buy that steam yacht! . . . The dirty snobs, that care more for red tape than for a mother's heart! Say, why wouldn't that make a swell title for Terry's next movie after *His Majesty, Junior? A Mother's Heart!*"

Terry, Ginger, and Josephus, the managers of the Edinburgh, South Africa and Peking R. R., were repairing a wreck and gleefully counting the temporarily dead passengers beside the slaty African caverns of what would, to unenlightened adult eyes, have seemed the back stairs.

Up those crevasses crept a small boy, obviously English, a boy with black hair, a cheery nose of a cocky Irish tilt, and gray flannels. He was of Terry's age.

"Hello!" he said.

"'Ello yourself," observed Ginger grandly.

"I'm going up to the top floor and I'm going to slide down all the banisters all the way down," confided the stranger.

"You better be careful on the floor below this. Some king's got it. There's a lot of cops there. How'd you ever get by 'em?" demanded Terry.

"I waited till they weren't looking, and slipped past 'em. Oh, I say, what a lovely train!"

He seemed a nice lad, and with much cordiality Terry urged, "Wouldn't you like to play train with us?"

"Oh, I'd love it!" cried the stranger. "I say, this is ripping! I've run away from my family. They want me to go to parties and have my picture taken."

"Isn't it fierce!" sympathized Terry.

"If you must 'ave your picture taken," Ginger remarked oracu-

larly, "you just tell your old lady to take you to Gumbridge's, on Great St. Jever Street, Whitechapel; 'e'll do you 'andsome—six bob a dozen."

"Oh, thank you very much indeed. I'll tell my mother. May I—would you mind if I started the train just once?"

The new boy was so enthusiastic about the signal system, he so fervently enjoyed the most sanguinary wrecks, that Ginger and Terry adopted him as a third musketeer, and Terry urged, "If you like it, come into my room. I've got some other things there."

The new boy gazed in awe at the electrical Derby race and the electrical Colosseum with the lions charmingly devouring Early Christians.

"I've just never *seen* such things," he sighed.

"What do you play with at home?" asked Terry.

"Why, we live in the country most of the year, and I ride and swim and play tennis and—and—that's about all. You see, I have ever such a stern tutor, and he keeps me at work so much. But—oh, I have a bicycle, too!"

Ginger and Terry exchanged glances of pity for their unfortunate new friend, and Terry said comfortingly, "But still, it must be slick to ride horseback on these English roads—not get jounced all to pieces like I do when I ride on the ranch."

"You ride on a ranch? I *thought* you were American!"

"Yes. I'm in the movies."

The stranger startled them with his scream: "Now I know! I knew you looked familiar! You're Terry Tait! I've seen you in the pictures. I loved 'em! Oh, I am so glad to meet you!"

The boys shook hands, while Ginger beamed and Josephus wagged with appreciation, and Terry said generously, "But you Englishers don't care for my stuff like they do at home. I guess I ain't so much as—"

"But honestly, Terry—if I may call you that?"

"Sure, kid."

"But I'm not English—at least only an eighth English. I'm Slovarian."

"With that Slovarian bunch with King Maximilian downstairs?"

"Yes. I'm Maximilian."

"Oh, go-wan! You don't look like a king! You look like a regular kid!"

"Blimey!" groaned Ginger, "I believe 'e is the king, Terry! I seen 'is pictures!"

"Gee," wailed Terry, "and I thought kings always wore tights and carried swords!"

"I'm frightfully sorry, Terry. Honestly, I hate being a king! It's just beastly! I have to learn six languages, and all about taxation and diplomacy and history and all those things—and I just want to play and be let alone! And they're always trying to assassinate me!"

"Jiminy! Honest?" breathed Terry.

"Yes; I've been shot at three times this year, and really, I don't like it a bit."

"Say, gee, Your Majesty has got to excuse me if I got fresh with you."

"Oh, please, won't you call me 'Max'?"

"Thunder! You can't call a king 'Max.' You call him 'Your Majesty,' or 'Sire.'"

"No, you don't! Not in private life."

"Well, gosh, I ought to know! I've read *A Gentleman of France* and a lot like that."

"Well, I ought to know. I'm a king!"

"But you haven't been a king long!"

"That's so. But anyway—oh, please call me 'Max.' Honestly, Terry, I'm so frightfully pleased to have met you. I've always been eager to know you ever since I saw you as the cabin boy in *The Burning Deck*. I say! That was simply ripping where you had that idea about dropping one end of the hose in the ocean and putting out the fire whence all but you had fled. Jove, you must have led the most perilous life!"

"Oh. That! That scene with the hose was taken in the studio. The fire wasn't nothing but some oily waste in pails. No. I never did anything dangerous. Doggone it! My mother won't let me!"

"Oh, Terry! Look! When we grow up, and I get to be a *real* king, and my mother and Sebenéco (he's the prime minister) and Professor Michelowsky (he's my tutor)—when I'm of age and they can't govern me any longer, will you be my Commander in Chief?"

"Well, I wouldn't mind, Max." In a sudden consideration of his own troubles, it is to be feared that Terry forgot he was addressing a king. "Anyway, I'd certainly like to get out of the

movies. You talk about your troubles—say, you don't know how turble it is to be a movie star. Awful!

"I have to give interviews, and every time I go out of the house somebody is there horning in, trying to photograph me, and I have to wear trick clothes—oh, horrible clothes!—and old ladies come and stroke my hair, and I have to listen while they tell me what a dandy actor I am—and honest, Max, I'm fierce, and now I've got to meet the king of—— Oh, golly, I forgot! You *are* the king!"

"Yes, hang it!"

"It's fierce!"

"It is, by Jove!" mourned Maximilian.

"I wish we could run away and find some nice farmhouse and just be kids there, and feed the pigs!"

"Rather! Wouldn't I like to!"

So engrossed was Terry in Maximilian that he had not realized that Ginger was standing stiffly at attention.

"Oh, jiminy, I forgot to introduce Mr. Ginger Bundock, Max—Your Majesty."

Then Ginger was kneeling, kissing Maximilian's hand.

"Oh, I say, please don't do that!" begged Maximilian.

"An Englishman, sir, knows wot's befitting to a Royal Majesty!" protested Ginger.

"Oh, chuck it, will you!"

"Right you are, sir!"

And the three small boys, actor and king and page, started to play with the delightful assassinations of the Early Christians in the model of the Colosseum and, aside from a profuse buttering of the conversation with "sirs," Ginger was not uncomfortably obsequious to these great men. Indeed, apropos of Terry's further complaint that it was awful to have to retake a scene twenty times, Ginger complained darkly, "If I may say so, sir, an 'otel page 'asn't too cheery a time, you know. There's old gentlemen that get very drunk, sir, and expects you to bounce out and buy 'em clean shirts after all the shops is closed, and there's old ladies that gets you into their rooms and asks you, 'Are you saved?' and—"

Maximilian interrupted, "Then we ought all three to run away and—"

"And be pirates!"

"Splendid!" said Maximilian.

"Uncle 'Ennery Bundock used to be a pirate!" yearned Ginger.

From the next room flared a voice, "Good heavens, Marie, I *told* you to send that dress down to be pressed."

Maximilian quaked, "Oh, it's my mother! She's looking for me."

"No," said Terry, looking pale. "It's mine."

"Erp!" said Josephus.

Bessie entered the room swiftly, glanced at Maximilian and cried, "Good heavens, can't I leave you for one moment without your picking up a lot of ragtag and bobtail? Who's this brat? Send him home. We're going to pack and go to Paris."

"Mother! This is King Maximilian of Slovaria!"

Bessie's eyes darted like hummingbirds. From her fluttered expression it might be judged that she was recalling the rotogravure pictures of the boy king. She gasped at Maximilian, "Oh, I'm so sorry I spoke mean to you! Honestly, are you the king?"

"I'm afraid so!"

"I guess I ought to call you 'Your Majesty,' but I met you so sort of sudden and—uh— Did your mother know you were coming up here, King?"

"I'm afraid not. I rather ran away."

"Oh, my gracious, then she'll be worried to death. I must take you right down to her. But we'd be real pleased to have you come up here and play whenever you get the time. Come on, Terry; we'll go down with His Majesty. And you, Ginger—you beat it!"

Hesitatingly, glancing at each other like conspirators but ruled by Bessie's clanging voice, the two royalties sheepishly followed her, not to the surreptitious back stairs but to the haughty flight in front. At her former enemy, the bobby, on guard on the floor below, Bessie snarled, "I'm with His Majesty," and stalked past him.

"I guess I better take you right to your mother, King, so's she'll know you're all safe," beamed Bessie.

"Oh, I'm— Honestly, I'm afraid she might not like it. Mother always has a massage and rests from teatime to dinner, and she doesn't like to be disturbed. Thank you very much for coming with me, but I can take care of myself now."

"Well, I thought, seeing I'm right here—it won't be a bit of trouble; I have a few minutes to spare, and maybe we won't go to

Paris tomorrow, after all—I thought it might be nice if I could arrange for you to play with Terry again.”

“Oh, I would like that! Perhaps we’d better see Count Elopatak. He’s in charge of most of my arrangements. He’ll be here in Room 416.”

Bessie saw that along the corridor doors were opening, curious heads popping out. A tremendous functionary in plush breeches, yellow waistcoat and powdered wig was bearing down. Seizing Terry’s hand, she followed Maximilian into 416. It was a bedroom converted into an office. At a desk was a tall, black-mustached man with a monocle.

He spoke to Maximilian in a strange tongue; the king answered.

Coming out from behind the desk, the monocled one bowed and observed, “It is very kind of you, Madame Tait, to have brought back His Majesty. And now if I may haf the pleasure of escorting you upstairs— My name is Elopatak; I am a gentleman-waiting to Their Majesties.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Count. I think I’ve talked to you on the phone.”

“I believe I do remember having that pleasure!” Very dryly.

Elopatak looked embarrassed as Bessie ardently shook his hand and crowed, “I want you to meet my boy, Terry. You’ve probably seen him in the cinema.”

“Oh! Oh, yes. Quite.”

“Terry and His Majesty got along just lovely, and I thought it was nice, both of them being famous like they are, to get together like this. You had a good time, didn’t you, King?”

“Oh, thank you very much.”

“And I thought it would be just lovely—both boys would prize it so much in after years—if we had a news photographer take a few nice pictures of ’em playing together. I guess both their Publics would be tickled to see ’em.”

Elopatak cried, all in one word, “Butnydearmadamethatwould-bequiteimpossibleohquite!”

“But look here! They like each other.”

“My dear madame, I’m afraid you cannot possibly understand that a royal personage has to consider many things besides his own preferences, and while I am sure His Majesty found your son delightful, as he is, you see he must represent Slovaria, and to be paraded in the cinema would not be dignified. . . .

"Maximilian! I hope you have not forgotten that you are to be taken to a Workmen's Club this afternoon by Prince Henry. I'm very sorry, but it's your mother's request, and I'm afraid you must dash in and dress for it at once!"

The king looked patiently melancholy. He shook hands with Bessie and with Terry; he murmured, "I do hope I shall see you again," and marched slowly out.

Bessie was clamoring, "But look here! Queen Sidonie would understand how I mean. After all, there's only one heart that can understand and do for a small boy, and that's his mother, so if I could see her and explain—"

"Her Majesty is resting, and she has every moment filled until Their Majesties go to Sandringham next Saturday. So if I may escort you upstairs—"

This time Elopatak did not offer his arm to Bessie; he took hers, firmly. Bessie saw that there was danger of a scene which might get into the papers, might ruin her. Stiffly she said, "Thanks; I can find my own way. *Good day!*"

As she clumped upstairs she was touchingly ignorant of what Maximilian and Terry had whispered to each other while she had been talking to Elopatak.

"I hate it all! Now I'll have to go and make b'lieve I'm a king for a lot of people in the East End. I wish I could run away with you!" groaned Maximilian.

"Look, Max! Let's *do* it! I hate being a star. News reels! Having to pose. Let's go be cabin boys on a pirate ship."

"Really? Really run away?"

"Sure; you bet. Look, Max, they watch you all day, but can't you sneak away good and early in the morning? I'll meet you to-morrow morning, by the back stairs, and we'll make plans."

"Yes! I will! But what do you mean by early?"

"Oh, before anybody's up. Eight-thirty. Or is that too early for you? What time do they get you up at home—I mean at the palace?"

"Six."

"What? Six? In the morning? Why, you poor kid!"

"Then I have to ride an hour before breakfast, and have a cold bath."

"Why, you poor *kid*! Gee, that's fierce! Gosh, I guess being

kings is even worse 'n being actors! But I bet you eat one darn' big breakfast after that."

"Oh, yes. Cocoa and sometimes three rolls!"

"Don't you get any ham and eggs?"

"For *breakfast*? Oh, one couldn't eat eggs for breakfast!"

"Say, in Poppy Peaks I eat six flapjacks and about six steen millions of gallons of maplsirup!"

"But," in rather a worried way, "I'm afraid they'll make us get up very early on a pirate ship."

"Naw! Didn't I see 'em making *Yo, Ho, Ho*? Pirates always drink rum all night, and they wear silk, and they don't get up till noon anyway. Look! Quick! I'll be there—back stairs—six tomorrow."

Max was politely shaking hands with the Taits and making an exit; but his hands were held behind him and he was showing six fingers.

Bessie was cross and hopeless-looking, all that evening. They were to have gone to the theatre, but Bessie said shortly that they would stay home—she had some plans she had to think about.

Terry's chief difficulty that evening was getting hold of Ginger. His mother had explained, adequately, that Ginger was a rough-neck, if indeed not an alley cat, and it was *time* she *did* something about Terry's taste for low *company* and where he *got* it, she couldn't *see*—and his father was *just* as bad.

By bribing the chambermaid to call Ginger, Terry was able to meet him for a second at the elevator.

"Look! Ginger! Be up here tomorrow, six in the morning. Max'll be here. We're going to run away; going to be pirates. Understand—*six!*"

"I'll be there, Gaffer! I'm not on duty till eight—I live out—but I'll sleep in a linen closet 'ere tonight, swelp me Bob!"

It was only because his mind was charged with the thought that he was going to run away now and lead the jaunty life of a pirate that Terry managed to awake at a quarter to six. He slipped into blue knickers and a blue jacket, creeping softly about the fog-dimmed room that he might not awaken the snorting Humberstone in the room beyond; he tiptoed down the corridor, followed by Josephus the hound, just as Ginger emerged from an elevator

which he had run himself, and as Maximilian slipped up the darkness of the back stairs.

Terry whispered feverishly, "We *are* going to run away. Now swear it!"

"I swear!" muttered Maximilian and Ginger.

"Swert!" said Josephus.

"Till death do us part, by jiminy Christmas!"

"Till death do us part!"

"And," croaked Terry, suddenly inspired, "we're going to start right now."

"Oh, I say, Terry, we couldn't do that! Not—not right now, without making plans. Boys always make plans before they run away. Lookit Tom Sawyer and Huck," protested Max.

"Am I the boss of this gang?"

Maximilian said humbly, admiringly, "Yes, Terry, but—"

"Am I, Ginger; am I, hey?"

"Ra-ther!"

"Didn't you," Terry demanded of Maximilian, "have some trouble getting up here this morning?"

"Yes. I did. I met a policeman patrolling the hall. He didn't dare say anything, but I know he watched me. I'm afraid he'll go wake old Elopatak."

"Do you see? Just as I've told you," crowed Terry. "Next time we may not be able to get together at all. We'll start right now, this minute. Bimeby we'll write nice letters to our mothers—and my, they'll be proud as anything when we come back from pirating and give 'em parrots and ivory and Spanish doubloons and all like that."

"I've got no mother nor no father but I'll give me Spanish doubloons to me uncle 'Ennery—'e used to be a pirate 'isself—'e says it's a rare life. I fancy we'll find a good pirate ship at Bristol," said Ginger, in a judicious way.

"Come! We'll start! Ginger'll take us down to the basement and show us how to sneak out," commanded Terry.

"But I say," protested Maximilian, "we have no money."

"Haven't we, though?" Terry jeered. "Lookit! Here's fifty pounds Mother gave me. I was to give it to the Infants' Charitable and Rehabilitation Institution today. . . . It *would* be good publicity, at that. Pictures of me giving each kid a pound. Still, I guess

pirates don't go out for publicity much. Not anyway when they're running away from their mothers. Come on, *will* you?"

And the resolute Terry was followed down the hall, into the elevator, through monastic cellars and corridors and fog-choked areaways, by the uneasy Maximilian and the triumphant Ginger. But as they came out on Berkeley Square, in a wet dawn smelling of coal smoke, broken only by the sound of a one-lunged taxicab, as Maximilian realized that he had escaped from the ardors of kinghood without being captured, while at the same time Ginger realized that he had given up an excellent job and was committing a felony, to wit, stealing and abstracting a valuable piece of property, to wit, one blue uniform, the property of the Hotel Picardie Co., Inc., London W. 1, their attitudes changed. Ginger became uneasy, looking back, trying to whistle, while Max strode on, rising into song, breathing this damp exciting air, peering into this mysterious fog, for the first time an adventurer in a land of boundless freedom, safe from the respectfully disapproving people who every moment watched him.

And as for Josephus, he rushed hither and yon with all the excitement of an honest alley dog who has been released from a satin suite.

Ginger stopped them to hiss, "We must disguise ourselves! Directly the alarm is given, any bobby will know us. I'm in me uniform, and anyone can see that you two are gentry."

"Why, Max and I have on awful' simple suits! Nobody would ever notice 'em," insisted Terry.

For once, Ginger was pleasantly able to be superior. "Simple, me eye! You may know all about courts and the likes of that, but I know the bobbies." The other two looked at him humbly, regretting their ignorance, and Ginger crowed: "I know a place where we can get some simply 'orrid old clothes. Oh, beautiful! And the man 'e knows me uncle 'Ennery, and I think I can get 'im to exchange our clothes for old ones without charging us a bob. Come on!"

Ginger led them into the mediterranean mysteries of Soho. Here, in streets that ran like wounded snakes, was a world of Italians, Greeks, Spaniards, with a sprinkling of Chinese and Syrians, dwelling in gloomy low-windowed flats over restaurants or over sinister-looking chemist shops with signs in strange peppery languages.

Josephus went hysterical over rubbish piles and pushcarts. Ginger stopped at an old-clothes bazaar on Greek Street, but at the door he looked terrified.

"Crickey! The lad will remember me uniform! 'E mustn't see me. You two must get some clothes for me, too; I'll meet you down at the next alley, and change in the court be'ind."

Ginger vanished, running. Terry and Maximilian glanced at each other nervously; nervously they called the valiant Josephus and stroked him. They could not confess that they were such weaklings, but neither had ever been allowed to go into a shop by himself, unwatched.

"Oh, hang it, I'm not afraid!" snarled Terry. Max looked grimly courageous.

The proprietor, a gentleman from the sunny lands of Syria, was eying them from the window. He rubbed his hands when they came in, and simpered.

"I want two old suits, quite old, for this boy and me," said Max. "We're—uh—going camping. And another suit for a boy about two inches taller than me."

"Erggg," said Josephus, in a tone of positive dislike.

While the proprietor fetched them, Maximilian muttered, "Do you suppose he has a decent dressing room here? Really, the place seems dirty!"

"No!" urged Terry. "We mustn't change here and leave our things—Scotland Yard might trace us by our clothes if we left 'em."

"Oh!" Maximilian seemed distinctly flattered. "I've read about Scotland Yard—detective stories I borrow from an English gardener at the palace at home. Do you suppose we'll have a real inspector hunting for us? *Clues*? How ripping! Do you *really* think so?"

"Oh, rather. At least I should think they'd search for a king, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes; I suppose they would. You see, I've been a king so short a time that I don't quite know. But think of a Scotland Yard inspector hunting for you—microscope and bloodstains and everything. I say, I do like this! It's so much more practical than Latin."

The old-clothes man was coming with three suits which were as beautifully 'orrid as Ginger had promised. All three of them were gray along the seams, they were greasy, and the buttons hung

wearily on worn threads. The three were worth, as masquerade costumes, six shillings altogether, but anyone with fancies about sanitation would have demanded five pounds to touch them.

"Just the thing for an outing, young gentlemen!" exulted the dealer. "Three quid for the lot—and your own clothes, of course. Swelp me, I'm giving 'em away."

The greenhorn Terry was roused to irritation. Three quid—he had learned from the scholarly Ginger that a quid was a pound. He snorted, "Don't be silly! I'll give you a pound and a half—what'd you call it, thirty shillings?—and we'll keep our own clothes."

As he spoke, he had brought out his roll of notes, the fifty pounds that were to see them to Bristol and the gay free life of piracy. The dealer's eyes popped, and he said crooningly:

"You're an American, aren't you, matey? And a fine little fellow, you and your little friend." Then, savagely, grasping Terry's shoulders, his yellow teeth showing evilly, "And where did you steal your fine clothes? I'll take *four* quid, and keep quiet—else I'll call in the police and we'll find out what a couple of American stowaways, blinkin' young tramps that've stole their clothes, are doing in my shop at seven in the morning!"

Josephus had, on sight, fallen out of love with the old-clothes dealer; he had growled when the man seized Terry; now, with enthusiasm, he grabbed the man's trousers leg and began to tear. The man leaped back, barricaded himself behind a rack of old coats. Terry snatched up the bundles of clothes, dropped a pound note on the counter, shooed Max and Josephus outside.

"He'll have us arrested!" quaked Max.

"Huh! He'll never call the police, now he's got his quid. The less he sees of the police, the better he'll like it. I ain't afraid!" said Terry boldly—while inside he was fully as calm as a cat chased up a tree by a pack of dogs.

They reached the alley mouth and the waiting Ginger, and Ginger drove them through the alley, a courtyard, another alley, and a blind areaway behind a shop. They undressed madly, while Terry told of their misadventure.

"I'll 'ave my uncle 'Ennery scrag 'im!" raged Ginger. "'E eats men alive, Uncle 'Ennery does."

Dressed, they were as scandalously soiled a trio as was to be found in greater London. Ginger insisted on tearing the caps and

stockings of his two heroes; on rubbing dirt over their faces.

He himself was capless. But now, free of his skin-tight uniform, he chucked his fears away with it, and cried, "Righto, me brave lads! 'Tis off to the boundin' blue—as Uncle 'Ennery says. What about a bit of breakfast?"

To avoid the old-clothes man, after hiding their proper clothes in a garbage can, he led them through further alleys and courts to a restaurant which he guaranteed to be the best twopenny dive in London. Relieved of worried relatives who insisted on nice porridge with nice cream, Terry and Max joyfully smeared themselves with a breakfast of fried fish, apple tart, pink cakes, and jam.

Josephus had a voluptuous bone, and as for Ginger, he breakfasted on tea and fish. He was a pal, he said, of the assistant pastry cook at the Hotel Picardie, and he could have all the cakes he wanted, any time.

"You can eat all the cakes you want? Any time? And nobody stops you?" gasped H.R.M. Maximilian III.

"All you want?" marveled Terry.

"Ra-ther!" said Ginger superciliously.

Mr. Ginger Bundock knew that Max was a real king, that Terry was a famous actor, but he couldn't believe it. They looked like two dirty small boys, and while they seemed to have read books, which had never been a habit in the Bundock family, they were so ignorant of his London that he couldn't help feeling superior. And over the fish and pink cakes he was rather sniffy with them about reaching Bristol and the haunts of pirate ships.

"It's west of London. Right away west," he said authoritatively.

"How far?" asked Terry.

"How far? Oh, a long way. Seventy-five miles. Or per'aps three 'undred."

"Pooh! That's not far!" Terry was trying to regain the scornfulness of leadership. "My dad and I drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco in one day, and that's five hundred miles!"

"Oh, I dare say! You Americans! An Englishman wouldn't care to go barging about like that, you know!"

"I think," hinted Max, "we ought to be taking a train at once, before they find we're missing."

"A train?" grumbled Ginger. "Oh, I say now, don't be balmy, Max—I mean, Your Majesty."

"Oh, I like being called Max. Please call me Max, Ginger. We're all fellow pirates now, you know."

"Aw, Max sounds Dutch," reflected Terry. "Let's call him 'Mix.'"

"Mix?" queried Maximilian.

"You bet! That's the name of one of the swellest cowpunchers in the movie game, ain't it, Ginger?"

"Oh, that would be nice. 'Mix.' And then of course as a pirate I suppose I *would* have to have a *nom de guerre*."

"A wot?" demanded Ginger.

"He's swallowed a dictionary!" protested Terry.

"Oh, I am sorry!" wailed Maximilian. He wasn't sure what he had done to offend these superior representatives of the Anglo-Saxon race, but he was ready to apologize for anything or for nothing to keep their comradeship.

"T'sall right, Mixie," said Terry generously; then abruptly, to Ginger, "Anyway, why shouldn't we take a train?"

Ginger recognized his master's voice. More humbly: "W're d'you suppose they'd look for us first? On trains, of course! We must walk. *Besides!* Did you ever 'ear of pirates taking trains?"

"Don't you think we ought to carry swords, though?" worried Terry. "Pirates always carry swords."

"Oh, I don't believe modern ones do," said Max. "I fancy they just carry revolvers and six-shooters and things like that, and I don't believe we need buy them till we reach Bristol."

"Well, maybe; but when we get to Bristol, we ought to buy sabers *and* guns, so when we find a pirate ship and go aboard, they won't think we're a lot of tenderfeet," insisted Terry.

"That's right," Ginger agreed. "Now as I say, we must walk, and I think we ought to go up to 'Ampstead 'Eath and practice being tramps—you know, meeting savage dogs, and sleeping under 'edges, and telling the direction by the bark on the trees, and making fires by rubbing sticks together."

"That's so; we must learn that," agreed Captain Terry, and the three boys, solemnly starting for the Spanish Main by way of Hampstead Heath, made a gallant beginning by finding a Number 24 bus.

The morning fog was gone when they reached the heath; the broad wastes of that tamed moorland were bright with sun and

wind, in whose exhilaration the three boys forgot that they were king and star and expert hotel page, and chased one another, yowled and whistled like any other three small boys, while Josephus went earnestly mad, snapping at royal heels with loving painfulness.

Max remembered from his English history that the heath had once been the favorite scene of highway robbery, and the four of them played highwaymen. Josephus, unhappily harnessed by Terry's belt, was the faithful coach horse, Terry was the driver, Ginger the haughty and noble passenger, and Max was permitted the grandest role of all, that of the robber.

Old Jim Dangerfield, the gallant coachman of the Yorkshire Flyer, was apprehensive. He clucked cheerily enough to his stout team of dappled marés, Jo and Sephus, and hummed a careless little tune ("My Toil and Strife Has Gotta Eye on We, Ba-by"), but when his passengers were not looking, brave Old Jim shuddered, hunched down within his many-caped cloak, now whitened with flying snowflakes.

On the seat beside him was a mysterious man in the old, ancient costume of the day. He had refused to give his name, but he was Lord Montmorency. Old Jim knew nothing of this, however.

And so they went on across the heath when all of a sudden a cloaked and masked man, riding a huge great big black horse, leaped out from behind a tree and leveling his pistol cried, "Your money or your life!"

Old Jim reached for his own pistol, but the villain shot him dead and he expired all over the ground, while the faithful Jo and Sephus licked his face—after craftily sneaking out of their harness.

But the brave Lord Montmorency was not to be quelled by anybody. Crying, "Come one, come all! I defy the blooming lot o' ye!" he leaped from the coach, drawing his trusty sword and, knocking the pistol from the wicked highwayman's hand, he engaged him in mortal combat.

It lasted a long time. In fact, it lasted till Old Jim Dangerfield protested, "Oh, that ain't fair—you two going on swording for hours and hours when I'm dead! I'm going to come to life!"

In the argument with Lord Montmorency and the robber as to whether a pistoled coachman could prove to be merely playing possum, they forgot the game and, panting, lay on the grass.

"My uncle 'Ennery was a 'ighwayman once," mused Ginger.

"Oh, didn't they arrest him?" fretted Terry.

"No, 'e wasn't *that* kind of 'ighwayman. 'E gave all 'e robbed to the poor."

"Where was this?" Terry sounded suspicious.

"Hey, quit scattering dust all over me, will you, Mixy?" was Ginger's adequate answer. "Excuse me, Your Majesty, but honestly, it gets in me eyes."

"When we go back—I mean, if we hadn't gone off to be pirates, I'd ask my mother to invite your uncle Henry to the palace," considered Max. "He must be a wonderful man. I don't like my uncles so much. But I had some lovely ancestors. I'm descended from Genghis Khan!"

"Oh, I've seen 'im. 'E's that banker from New York. 'E often stays at the Picardie," condescended Ginger.

"I think that must be another Khan," Max said doubtfully. "I think Genghis lived years and years ago. And my grandfather had an estate with two hundred thousand acres of land!"

"Huh! That's nothing," said Terry. "I know a movie actor in California that's got a million acres."

"Oh, he has not!" protested Max.

"He has, too. And I'm going to have a million million acres and grow bees, when I grow up."

"Oh, you will not!" complained Max. "Besides, I'll mobilize my army and conquer Roumania and Bulgaria and a lot of countries, and then I'll have a million trillion billion acres! And another of my ancestors was Seljuk."

"Never heard of him. Jever hear of Seljuk, Ginger?"

"Now! Never 'eard of 'im!"

"And one of my ancestors," continued Terry, "was sheriff of Cattaraugus County, New York!"

"Me uncle 'Ennery was a sergeant major in Boolgaria," Ginger confided.

"Oh, say, let's play soldiers!" cried Terry. "Which of you has the most military training?"

"I almost joined the Boy Scouts once. There was a curate ast me to join 'em," reflected Ginger. "But you, Mixy, a king must 'ave bushels of military training."

Max confessed, "Not really. Just fencing and riding as yet. Oh,

I am a field marshal in the Slovarian Army, and I'm a colonel in the British Army, and in Italy I'm an admiral and a general, but I wouldn't say I was a soldier."

"I know all about militaries. I saw 'em making some of the film of *The Big Parade*," boasted Terry; and Max, who had been faintly irritated at their ignorance of his renowned ancestor, Seljuk, rose again to admiration for his hero, the great Terry Tait, and murmured, "Oh, I saw that picture. And you saw them *making* it? That must have been priceless! You be the captain on one side, and Ginger can be it on the other."

And that was a very nice war. There were any number of hand-to-hand combats, as well as a devastating machine gun produced by Ginger's winding his 3/6 watch and remarking, "Brrrrrr!"

When the war ended they lay in the long grass again while Ginger modestly admitted that during the World War his uncle 'Ennery had single-handed captured sixteen Germans.

Terry interrupted, to shout, "Oh, I've got a dandy game. Let's play king!"

"Oh, that's no fun!" protested Max.

"I don't mean like any of these ole kings they got today—I mean like there used to be in the Olden Times. I'll show you. You'll like it, Mixy. I'll be king, and Ginger, you're Lord High Executioner."

"Kings don't have Lord High Executioners!" protested Max.

"They do too! Anyway, they always usta have! And Ginger is my Lord High Executioner, and you're a rebel, Mixy; you're leading a band of brigands."

"Who's the brigands?" said Max darkly.

"Josephus, of course, you poor boob. Now, look. See, here's my throne." Terry had found a beautiful rock on the heath.

H.R.M. Terry sat down, very royal, his left hand on his hip, his right waving an object which resembled a weed but which to him was a golden scepter.

"Now, you and Josephus go and hide off there over the hill," he ordered Max, "and begin to sneak up on us. You're a band of rebellious peasants. And you, Ginger, you're my Commander in Chief."

"But you said I was Lord Executioner, 'ooever 'e is!"

"You're going to be, later, stupid! Now you beat it, Max! That's it, hide!"

As Max and Josephus began a most realistic creep through the

grass, glaring their hatred of all monarchical institutions, King Terry reasonably addressed his Commander in Chief, together with hordes of other courtiers who were standing behind the commander:

"What ho, my lieges! Trusty messengers, coming apace, do give me informations that hell is let loose in our mountaineous domains and a band of rebels is now approaching. Gwan out, then, my brave troops, and capture 'em. Seek to the nor-nor-east, I bid thee. . . . Now you go capture 'em, Ginger; but you put up a fierce battle, Max."

Fierce battle.

During it, King Terry bounced with excitement, demanding, "Lookit, Ginger, you gotta keep running in—you're a messenger—telling me how the battle is going; see, I'm standing up here at the window of a tower looking across my royal plains."

The trusty commander brought in the rebels, and despite a plaintive "Ouch!" from Max, cast them roughly down before the king, who climbed from the tower (which resembled a hummock of grass), seated himself on his throne again, and addressed the traitor:

"Villain, art guilty?"

"What do I say? I've never played this game before," begged Max.

"Neither have I, stupid! Haven't you got any imagination? What *would* a villain say if a king bawled him out like that?"

"I don't know. Oh, I fancy he'd say, 'No, I aren't.'"

"You are too! Commander in Chief, *isn't* he guilty? Didn't you catch him treasoning?"

"Ra-ther!"

"Then— (Now you're Lord High Executioner.) Then off with his head!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Max. "Kings can't have people's heads cut off!"

"Of course they can! Don't be silly. Maybe they can't in Slovaria, but lots and lots of places they can."

"Can they, honest?" admired Max. "I wish I could! By Jove, I'd have old Michelowsky's head off in two twos! He's my tutor—a horrid man!"

"Dry up! You hadn't ought to interrupt a king, don't you know that? Now you get your head cut off. And Josephus, too. Now you

form a procession. See, I walk in front, and then you and Josephus, and Ginger in behind with the headsman's sword—here, you can take my scepter for sword, Ginger."

And they marched to the sweetly solemn tune of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," chanted by Terry, and the noble tragedy of the event was only a little marred by Ginger's peeping at his 3/6 watch just before he dealt the awful blow, and exclaiming, "It's one o'clock! We must find a bit of lunch. I'm not going to start pirating on an empty stomach!"

Bessie Tait, whenever she felt depressed and put upon, slept late in the morning, waking only to think of the broiling letters she would write to her enemies, and to doze off again. This morning, at ten, she was still sunk among the little pink-and-white lace pillows with which she had adorned the Hotel Picardie bed when she was roused by her maid and her secretary, crying, "Oh, madame, there's a lady; I think it's—"

As Bessie sat up, iron-jawed and furious in her mosquito-netting nightgown, the maid and secretary were thrust aside by a woman who dashed into the room raging, "What have you done with my son?"

She was a tall woman, not unlike Bessie herself, and if her voice was not so harsh, she was more voluble. "If you have kidnaped him, if you have let him go off with your brat—"

"Are you crazy? Get out of here! Miss Tingle, call a policeman!" wailed Bessie.

"Oh, madame, it's Queen Sidonie of Slovaria!" whimpered the secretary.

"Queen! . . . Sidonie! . . . Oh, my Lord!" howled Bessie, capping among the pillows.

The queen flew to the bed, savagely seized her arm. "Where is he? Is he here?"

"Your son? The king?"

"Naturally, idiot! I know you lured him here yesterday—"

"Now, you can't talk to me like that, queen or no queen! How do I know where the boys are? I don't get up in the dawn! We'll see."

Bessie huddled into a dressing gown that was like the froth on sparkling Burgundy. Hoping, in her agitation at this somewhat unexpected way of meeting royalty, that Queen Sidonie was notic-

ing her superior chic, she led Sidonie quickly through the living room, into Terry's room.

And it was empty.

In the room beyond, Humberstone, the valet whom Bessie had hired just for this purpose of impressing Sidonie, slumbered in a fume of gin, and instead of an edifying morning coat he exhibited the top of a red flannel nightgown.

If Sidonie had landed on Bessie somewhat precipitately, it had been a lover's greeting compared with the way in which Bessie hailed the valet, seizing an ear in each hand. The tempestuous Sidonie, for a generation the storm cloud of the Balkans, looked almost admiringly at Bessie's vocabulary, and the flower of English Service quaked as he stated that, because of his neuralgia, he had overslept, and of Master Terry and of all kings whatsoever he knew nothing.

Bessie flew at Terry's cupboard. "His blue suit is gone!" She flew at the telephone. "Ginger—that's the no-count bellboy Terry plays with—he's missing, they say downstairs. Oh, Queen! He's missing! My little boy! And I been so hard on him! Oh, you may love your kid, the king, a lot, but you don't love him one bit more than I do mine and—"

And two women, Her Majesty of Slovaria and Mrs. Rabbit Tait of Mechanicville, sobbed on each other's shoulders.

It took Bessie exactly six minutes to dress—Sidonie drove out the trembling maid and herself helped Bessie. In six and a half minutes they were in the royal suite below—and Bessie, beside the queen, stalked past the agitated Count Elopatak with the air of a Persian cat. She scarcely noticed the perfumedness and powderiness of the queen's own rooms, or the weeping maids.

Sidonie had the manager of the hotel, its three detectives, and all the policemen on duty, in her room instantly. The policemen now on guard had gone on duty at eight; they had seen nothing of the king. No servant in the hotel had seen anything of him since yesterday. Elopatak was, meantime, calling Scotland Yard. In a few minutes he had a report from one of the policemen who had been on duty in the corridor through the night that he had seen Maximilian playing ball in the corridor early, about six, he thought; he didn't know whether Maximilian had returned to his room or had gone upstairs.

Just then Scotland Yard had a report from the London garbage-

collecting department that two good suits of boys' clothing and a Hotel Picardie uniform had been found in an alley off Greek Street, Soho.

Bessie and Queen Sidonie identified the clothes from the descriptions.

"They've run off together! It's that cursed bellboy's doing! Come on, Queen, let's grab a taxi and start right out from that alley looking for 'em!"

"Yes!" cried Sidonie, to the stupefaction of her suite, and she fled toward the door, arm in arm with Bessie Tait. At the door she shouted back, "I'll telephone every few minutes! Tell the Home Secretary to see that hundreds of policemen start right off to look for His Majesty." She slammed the door; she jerked it open to add, "And for Terry. Hundreds, do you hear? Hundreds!"

While the alarm went out to every policeman in Greater London, while the newspaper offices went wild with the news that even Royalty could not keep from them, two anxious women, very chummy, sadly patting each other's hands and calling each other "My dear," rode through all the tangled streets and byways of Soho, stopping to ask every policeman for three small boys and an undistinguished dog who was, for twenty-four hours, to become the most famous dog in the world.

Because of their free and joyful play—and perhaps because of the agreeable menu of pork pie, vealnam pie, steak and kidney pudding, sausage and mashed, strawberry tart, vanilla ice, chocolate ice and little mince pies—the three musketeers were curiously sleepy after luncheon at a "cocoa room" near the Heath. They agreed that they ought to be starting for Bristol and the wild life, oh! immediately, but perhaps they would do better if they rested a bit—by attending a movie, which promised something nice in the way of a drama about a poisoner.

Terry had become used to tackling shopkeepers. With the loftiest confidence he engaged a greengrocer to keep Josephus during the movie, and bought the most expensive seats.

It was a pleasant and elevating picture, and moral, as the poisoner died in tremendous agony.

They came out of the theatre at four, to find the streets littered with newspaper placards shrieking, **DISAPPEARANCE OF BOY KING AND YANK CINEMA STAR.**

"Jiminy!" whispered Terry. He hastily bought each of the evening papers and led his pirate band into the darkest, least conspicuous back corner of an A.B.C. tearoom, to read the news.

The first paper announced that Terry, who, though but eight years old, had been a celebrated character in Chicago before he became a film star (which was a neat way of saying that he was a gunman, and still avoiding the libel law), was believed to have persuaded His Majesty, to whom he had been presented at a well-known West End hotel, to run away. There was no proof that Terry was connected with the notorious Lisbon gang of counterfeiters and kidnapers, but still, the police were looking into it.

The second paper spoke of the sinister disappearance of a red-headed hotel page named Alf Bundock, whose record the police were examining.

The third came out bluntly and proved that it was a crime of the Bolsheviki, and demanded that the government renounce its dastardly policy of permitting Bolshevik spies to roam around innocent England—kidnaping kings this way.

All the newspapers contained enormous biographies of King Maximilian and much sketchier accounts of Terry, who was, according to the three versions, eight, fourteen, and four years of age. And all three had pictures, lots of pictures—Maximilian in the uniform of a Czechoslovakian Horse Marine; Maximilian opening the Museum of Osteothermodynamics in Tzetokoskavar, capital of Slovaria; Terry in the role of the Poor Little Blind Boy (he recovered his sight, of course, when the Kind Rich Lady and the Bighearted Surgeon got hold of him) in the film *Out of the Night*; Terry gardening at Poppy Peaks—Terry was known to be as fond of gardening as Presidential candidates are of haymaking; the Hotel Picardie—X marks the spot; and sixteen lovely portraits of Queen Sidonie.

But the *Evening Era* had the greatest triumph of all—an account of Josephus the Hound, with a photograph furnished by the courtesy of the Bond Street Dog and Animal Shop. Only it was the photograph of a greyhound. But Terry was slightly comforted by a full-page advertisement of his film *Kiddies Kourageous*, which the enterprising Halcyon Theatre was going to revive.

The three boys crouched over the papers; even Josephus was crouching, under the table.

"All the 'tecs in the United Kingdom will be looking for us. We

must cut and run," moaned Ginger. Then, with such concentration as he had never given to any intellectual problem, even the question of transmuting a shilling tip into two-and-six, he considered, "No, we must 'ide. They'll be watching even the roads. We'll lay up for a couple of days, and then start out by midnight. Yuss. 'Ide under 'edges."

"Splendid. Just like escaping from German prison camps!" gloated Terry. "But where shall we hide till— Oh! At your uncle Henry's! You said he lived in London. And he'll tell us all about pirates. You said he was a pirate once, didn't—"

Ginger looked dark-browed; Ginger looked distressed. "Now. Can't be done. Me uncle 'Ennery and me isn't on speaking terms."

"Then you'll just have to get on speaking terms! It's the only place we've got."

"Now. Can't."

"Nonsense!" It was Max, very vigorous. "Of course an old pirate would be glad to greet young ones. You'll take us there at once, Ginger."

"I will not!"

"Do you hear me, Bundock?" Terry and Ginger stared equally at the change in the amiable Max's voice. "I'm not requesting it; I'm giving a command. Do you happen to remember who I am?"

Ginger looked more scared than ever; he snapped back into his training as a hotel servant; he quivered, "Very well, sir, but I don't advise it; not Uncle 'Ennery I don't."

But he led them, sneaking through alleys, craftily taking round-about bus lines, shivering every time they fancied a policeman was looking at them, across the river and into the district of Bermondsey. It was, to Max and Terry, a London altogether different from the city of Palladian clubs, snug Georgian houses about tranquil squares, haughty shops and immaculate streets that they had known. They were bewildered by a waste of houses, two stories high, made of stone or a grimy grayish-yellow brick, set side by side, without grass or trees—miles of brick dog kennels, broken only by bristling railroad tracks, warehouses like prisons, innumerable public houses that smelled of stale beer, and vast streets that were as disordered as they were noisy.

They left a bus on Abbey Road, and Ginger guided them up a side street full of little shops. It was six o'clock now, with smoke-streaked fog settling down again; the bars were open and into

them streamed navvies with trousers tied above the ankles, old charwomen in shawls and aprons, scrawny children with beer cans. They were all contemptuously indifferent to a stray American small boy, these thirsty workers.

"Let's hurry to your uncle's," Terry begged.

"You won't like 'im," said Ginger darkly.

"But you said he was so jolly! That time he sang 'Knocked 'Em in the Old Kent Road' to the Empress of Japan."

"Oh. *That* time," observed Ginger.

His steps slackened. For all their urging, for all Josephus' cheerful leaping, Ginger loitered, till they came to a hand laundry and, pointing through a steamy window at a small squirrel-toothed narrow-shouldered man who was turning a wringer, Ginger muttered, "That's 'im; that's Uncle 'Ennery."

Terry and Max stared, feeling empty at the stomach. They said nothing. They didn't need to. They simultaneously doubted whether Uncle 'Ennery had ever captured sixteen Germans at once, or been more than just engaged to the princess of the South Seas isle.

"You *would* barge in!" complained Ginger and, inching open the door of the laundry, he whimpered, "Uncle 'Ennery!"

Uncle 'Ennery lifted his head, rubbed the back of his neck as though it hurt, peered through the steam at Ginger, and remarked, "Ow, it's you, you little beggar! Get out of this! Coming around in your 'otel uniform, making mock of your betters, and they your own relations! And now you're in the gutter again; you're in rags-antatters again, and I'm glad of it, I am. Get out of this!"

"I ayn't in the gutter! I'm just on me 'oliday," protested Ginger.

"Yes, a fine 'oliday, as'll end in the workus. Get out!"

"Give me three bob to show 'im," Ginger whispered to Terry and, displaying the money, smiling a false sugar-sweet smile, he crooned, "Me and me friends are going tramping. We'll give you this three bob if you'll let us sleep 'ere tonight."

"Let's see the money!" demanded Uncle 'Ennery. He turned the shillings over and over. Looking slightly disappointed that they seemed to be genuine, he grunted, "I ought to 'orsewhip you, you young misbegotten, but I'll let you stay. Only you goes out and gets your own supper."

Without further welcome, he led the three boys and Josephus among the tubs in the back room of the laundry, up an outside

stairway to a chaste establishment consisting of one room (Uncle 'Ennery was a widower and childless) with one bed, unmade, a fireplace stove, a chair and a cupboard.

"You can sleep on the floor," he snarled. "The dog—'e goes out in the areaway."

Terry looked indignant but—they were alone, fugitives, hunted by the entire British police force. . . . What was the penalty for kidnaping a king? Hanging, or life imprisonment? He sighed and stood drooping, a very lonely little boy.

Somewhat comforted at being taken in by his loving uncle, Ginger piped, "Cheer-o! We'll go 'ave a bite to eat. There's a love-ly fried-fish shop on the corner."

He walked ahead of his comrades in crime, rather defiantly. Behind him, Terry whispered to Max, "I don't believe his uncle Henry ever was a deep-sea diver!"

"No; and I don't believe he was a sergeant major in the Bulgarian Army—hardly more than a private," Max said.

"Or an aviator!"

"Or an African explorer!"

Ginger pretended that it didn't matter that he had lost now the Uncle 'Ennery whose exploits had been the one glory by which he had been able to shine beside a king. Most boisterously he ushered them into the fried-fish shop with, "If you toffs ayn't too good for it, 'ere's the best bloaters in London."

And through supper he contradicted them, laughed at their ignorance of such fundamental matters of culture as the standing of the Middlesex cricket team and the record of the eminent middleweight, Mr. Jem Blurry. So Max and Terry became refined. They were sickeningly polite. Their silence shouted that they regarded him as low.

When they had reluctantly returned to the mansion of Uncle 'Ennery, their host was sitting on the one chair, his shoes out on the one bed, reading an evening paper. He glared at them, but the beer in which he had invested their three shillings had warmed his not overphilanthropic heart, and he condescended to Ginger, "'Ere's a funny go, and at your 'otel. This king a-missing, along of a Yank actor. Goings-on!"

Now, for the many weary years of his life, Ginger had singularly failed to impress his uncle. Now he had his chance to startle this exalted relative.

"And did you 'appen to notice who was the third boy went with 'em?" he mocked.

"A third one? Now. Ayn't read all the article yet."

Ginger—while Terry and Max wildly shook their heads at him—loftily pointed out a paragraph in the paper. Uncle 'Ennery spelled out, "It is sus-pec-ted that wif them was a pyge nymed Alf Bundock who—" He leaped up, terrified. "Bundock? Is that you, you young murdering blighter?"

Ginger laughed like the villain making exit after tying the heroine to the circular saw.

Uncle 'Ennery looked at Max and Terry with a wild surmise, silent upon a peak in Little West Poultry Street, S. E. He pointed a terrified finger at Terry. "You, there! Speak, will yer?"

"What's the trouble with you?" snapped Terry.

"My eye! It's true!" wailed Uncle 'Ennery. "You're an American—or some sort of sanguinary foreigner! You three get out of 'ere! I'll have nothing to do with it! Bringing down the police on me! Get out of 'ere, all of you, kings or no kings!"

Uncle 'Ennery was in a panic, his eyes insane, his hands waving. He drove them down the stairs, through the courtyard—when Terry stopped to call Josephus he almost hit them—and through the laundry into the street. He could be heard slamming the door, bolting it.

"Uncle 'Ennery never did like the police," reflected Ginger. "Well, I'll find you a nice bit of 'ay in a ware'ouse."

In a pile of wet and soggy hay, among vile-smelling boxes and carboys, between a warehouse and tracks along which freight trains shrieked all night long, the three boys crept together and shivered and wept—and went fast asleep.

All day they had searched, Bessie Tait and Queen Sidonie, wherever two adventurous boys seemed likely to be. They had so far forgotten any social differences between them that not only did they exchange anecdotes about their boys' incomparable naughtiness in the matter of sugar on porridge, but also, as they sat exhausted at tea in Sidonie's boudoir, Bessie gave and Sidonie gratefully noted down a splendid recipe for baked Virginia ham with peaches.

"And if you come to America, you simply must come and stay

with Mr. Tait and me, and don't let any of these millionaire producers pinch you off!"

"I *will* come and stay with you, my friend! And Terry and my boy shall play together!" promised H.R.M. "And you will come to us in Slovaria?"

"Well, if I can find time, I'll certainly try to, Sidonie," consented Bessie Tait, and the two women—so alike, save that Bessie had the better dressmaker—leaned wearily back and smoked their cigarettes, and glared when the terrified Count Elopatak came in to announce that Prince Sebenéco, Prime Minister of Slovaria, had left for London by airplane.

"The old fool!" murmured Sidonie.

Then she tried to look haughty, but it ended in the two tired female warriors grinning at each other as Elopatak elegantly slunk out.

"Elopatak's misfortune," confided Sidonie, "is that he has no calm. He permits the gross material to rule him. He would be calm like myself, if he would only take up Higher Thought."

Bessie leaned forward excitedly. "Oh! Have you taken up Higher Thought, too? So have I! Isn't it just lovely! There's the livest Higher Thought teacher in Los Angeles that I go to every week—such a fine, noble-looking man, with the loveliest wavy black hair!

"Before I went to him, I used to lose my temper—people are *such* fools!—and I used to try to exercise my selfish will on them, but now whenever I get sore at some poor idiot, I just say, 'All is mystery and 'tis a smile that unlocks the eternal kinship of man to man,' and then I get just as placid and nice as can be. Such a help!"

"Isn't it! We have just the same sentence in Higher Thought at home—only it doesn't sound quite the same, being in Slovarian. And isn't that curious: my healer is also a handsome man, with such won-derful hair! Of course, in my position I have to belong to the State Church, but it's out of Higher Thought I've learned that any man is as good as I am, even when he obviously isn't.

"And now I never lose my temper any more. I just say, 'I am Calmness, therefore I am calm.' If I could only get Elopatak and Prince Sebenéco—the filthy swine! Oh, Bessie, you don't know what meeting you means to me! Somehow, in Slovaria and here in England, they don't seem to understand how sensitive I am!"

All evening the two mothers raged and roamed, but by one of the morning, Bessie was asleep, exhausted. A few hours later it was she who (saluted by bobbies and guards and aides as she stalked down the royal corridor) awoke Sidonie early—and with her she was dragging a scared Ginger Bundock.

This was twelve hours after Ginger, Terry, and Max had lain tearfully down in the damp hay by the warehouse in Bermondsey.

The management of the Picardie had excitedly telephoned to Bessie that Ginger had returned; that he knew the whereabouts of the two kings. They brought him in, like a prisoner, and Bessie dragged him to Queen Sidonie.

In Sidonie's bedroom, with its tall bed, scarlet-draped and surmounted by a vast golden crown, its purple carpet and a vista of little tables, deep chairs, vast dressing gowns and long mirrors, Sidonie sat up in bed, looking scraggly and care-channeled, smoking a cigarette nervously, while Bessie, in her foamy dressing gown, paced wildly. And to this dreadful audience Ginger told his story.

"It isn't my fault, Your Majesty. 'Is Majesty and Master Tait, they wanted me to go along. They said they were just going for a stroll. They said it would be fun to dress up in old clothes. I don't know what they did with me uniform and their clothes, but we changed in an alley off Greek Street, Soho. Then we went to play on 'Ampstead 'Eath. Then they wanted to go into the country and we walked west—"

Now the warehouse where, so far as Ginger knew, Max and Terry were still sleeping, was southeast.

"—walked west, far into the country. Oh, we walked far into the night, we did, and I think we came almost to 'Arrow on the 'Ill, and we slept under a 'edge. And when I woke this morning, they were gone. So I 'opped a lorry and came right in to tell you, ma'am. Swelp me, it was none of my doing! And I 'eard 'em say something last night about going to Scotland, so if you searches all the roads north and west—"

Already Sidonie was shrieking for Elopatak; already she was telephoning to Scotland Yard.

"And of course the 'otel never give me my place again, Your Majesty, but oh, please, could you persuade the police not to arrest me?"

"Certainly. They shan't arrest you," glowed Sidonie. "Of course,

if young gentlemen like His Majesty and Master Terry told you to accompany them, there was nothing else to do but recognize your place and obey them. I quite understand, and I'm thankful for your being so brave as to come to us. I don't suppose the hotel will want you, after this, but we might need you. You go up to Terry's room and stay till we call you. I'll see the police."

"That's the idea," said Bessie amiably, and to Ginger, "Skip . . . Sidonie! Breakfast! Quick! We'll start for Harrow."

"Right you are! We'll have the little fiends—the darlings!—in two hours. Oh, I'm so relieved!" said Sidonie of Tzetokoskavar to her friend Bessie of Mechanicville.

Terry woke only enough to know that he was awake, that he was miserable, that he was rather wet and extremely cold. He opened his eyes stupidly, amazed to find himself curled in filthy hay, between two boxes, looking out on a foggy welter of freight cars.

He wanted his warm bed, and cocoa coming, and his mother's voice. He had a feeling of loss and disaster—no excitement that he was free of photographers and press agents and about to become a rollicking pirate.

There was something comfortable about life, however, and he awoke enough to sit up and discover that it was the muzzle of Josephus, tucked in beside his knee. Josephus roused to lick his hand and to whine hungrily.

"Poor pup! I'll get you something," asserted Terry. Then his sympathy for Josephus widened enough to take in Max, curled with both hands beneath one cheek, hayseed spotting his filthy clothes. "Poor kid!" muttered Terry, and a horrible doubt crept into him.

Were they really going to enjoy being pirates?

He realized that Ginger was not there and that a note, scratched in pencil on a muddy sheet of wrapping paper, had been thrust through Josephus' collar. Terry anxiously snatched it out, to read:

Dear Friends Yr. Majesty & Terry:

I haven't been any help to you I am awful sorry Im just in the way I made believe I didn't care the way my Uncle acted but he was turble and I think the best thing I can do for you is to go away am going back to hotel and hope can do this for

you, will tell them you are going different way from way you are going so through then off the sent they will not know you are going the way you are going I appresheate your taking me along hope have not been too disrespektfull when you get to be pirates maybe you will give me a chance to come join you am sure you will sune be Orficers. Must close now yrs respectfly Ginger PS I lied about my Uncle he wasn't never no pirate, sodger ettc.

When Max had been awakened and had read the note, he quavered, "I'm not sure we can get along without Ginger. We don't know about tramping and all that. Do you think we'd better go home now? We could take a taxi."

"Never!" said the valiant Terry. "Go home, where you have to wash all the time, and they won't let you have any pink cakes, and there's newspaper reporters asking you questions, and you have to act like you liked it when horrible old maids pat you on the head? When we could be pirates and sail the bounding main?"

But he didn't sound very defiant, and feeble was Max's "Well, perhaps."

"Come on, Mixy; come on, you, Josephibus!" caroled Terry, with false heartiness. It was suddenly disheartized by a cockney voice beside them.

"Come out of that, you! Wot d'yer think ye're doing, sleeping there? Get out!"

It was a large man in a watchman's uniform, and the criminals slunk most ingloriously out of the railroad yards. Josephus slunk after them. They found a mean and dirty teashop.

Terry wanted the corn flakes, Max desired the porridge, at which they had scoffed twenty-four hours before. The waitress told them they could have fried eggs, boiled eggs, bloaters, or kippers.

They sighed, and had fried eggs.

"I wonder," said Max, suddenly excited, "if we dare drink tea. I've always wanted to drink tea. But my mother and Professor Michelowsky never would let me. Do you suppose we dare?"

"Oh, let's! No matter what our mothers say! A pirate can't always be thinking about what his mother says!"

And daringly, taking the first step into lives of dissipation, they ordered tea.

Now it may be true, as envious foreigners assert, that the British

Empire is founded on four things: tea, beer, calico, and diplomacy. But this uncheering cup at the den in Bermondsey was not the sort of tea on which empires are likely to be founded. It was bitter. It was lukewarm.

Max tasted it, and shook his head. "I don't understand why people drink it," he mused. "And I don't understand why I have to study Latin. And I don't understand why Mother is so cross with me when I tell her I want to be a farmer. Oh, dear, I'm"—his voice quavered—"I'm glad we're going to be pirates! They don't drink tea. They drink rum. And that must be nice!"

Very slightly cheered by breakfast, they started for Bristol.

Bristol, Ginger had said, was west. Very well, they would walk westward.

The waitress told them which direction was west, and they trudged for miles. They kept on gallantly—stopping only to keep Josephus out of a dog fight and keep the other dogs in it; to buy large and indigestible balls of hard candy; to watch a back-yard cricket game; to dally with a light mid-morning refreshment of toffee, sugar buns, cocoa, tongue, strawberry tart, and shortbread.

Toward noon they came out on a stretch of railroad tracks which barred their advance. While they were looking for a crossing, Terry started, and whimpered, "Look, Mixy! There's where we slept last night! We've gone in a circle!"

"Oh, fiddle!" raged Max the Pirate.

They sat disconsolately on a box, Josephus abashed at their feet.

"I guess," Terry suggested, after a gloomy pause, "we better take a taxi till we get out of London. Then we can follow a road west. Let's see how much money we got left. Gimme that two shillings I lent you and we'll count up."

They gravely spread all their notes, their silver and copper, between them on the box, and counted them. Of Terry's fifty pounds, together with the fifteen-pence which had been Max's pocket money, they now had left forty-seven pounds and a penny.

"Oh, we can do lots with that!" gloated Terry. "We could buy a lady dog, to go with Josephus. He must get lonely."

"But he might not like her."

"Oh, gee, *that's* easy! Lookit. We'd go into a dog store, see, and I'd say to the clerk, 'Look, I'd say, 'I want to find a lady dog for my dog Josephus,' I'd say, 'and I want him to look around and see

which lady dog he likes,' I'd say, and then Josephus would look around at all the cages they got dogs in—"

"Honestly, I think it's a shame to keep dogs in cages."

"So do I. I wouldn't like to live in no cage. Gee, I read once, it was in a book of stories, there was this man that had been a revolution, and they put him in a cage—oh, yes, it was in China—"

"Oh, I would like to go to China. Let's go to China!"

"Sure; you betcha. Pirates always go to China, I think they do, and—"

"You don't suppose we'd have to do any murders or anything nasty like that, do you, Terry, when we're pirates?"

"Oh, not *now*; they just did that in the Old Days. Now they just stop ships that belong to rich merchants and take silk and all like that, and then they give a lot to the poor—"

"And bleedin' nice of 'em I calls it!" said a new voice, a dripping and slimy voice behind them, and a filthy hand swooped upon their money.

They looked back, gasping, at a man with a hard little nut of a face under a greasy cap. Instantly the hand had tumbled them off the box, to right and left; a foot in a broken shoe had caught Josephus under the jaw as he leaped up growling; the filthy hand had scooped up every penny of their horde; and the thief was galloping away.

They followed, Josephus followed, but they could not find the robber.

They crouched again on the box. For five minutes they could not quite comprehend that they had no money whatever; nothing for lunch, nothing for movies.

"But nobody can't down us! We'll work our way!" flared Terry.

It did not sound too convincing, and Max answered nothing whatever. They started off again silent. By repeatedly asking, they managed to keep going westward and, after their competent mid-morning lunch, they were not too hungry till three o'clock. Terry felt hungry enough then, and Max's face seemed to him thin and taut.

"I guess we better work for some grub now," he muttered. "Let's ask 'em here in this news shop. There's a nice, kind-looking old lady in there."

To the nice, kind-looking old lady, in the dusty recesses of the

shop, he confided, "We're very hungry. Could we do some work for you?" And, winningly: "Your shop needs cleaning."

The nice, kind-looking old lady said never a word. She inspected them benevolently. Then she hurled an old paper-bound book at them, and at last she spoke: "Get along with you!"

They asked for work at an ironmonger's, at a surgery, at a fish market, at three restaurants and coffee stalls, but nowhere did they find it. Toward evening, in a terrifying dimness over unknown streets that stretched endlessly toward nowhere, Terry confessed:

"We can't do it. We'll have to give ourselves up. But we'll study to be tramps and pirates and everything! We'll be able to do it next time!"

"Yes!"

They tramped on till they found a policeman, a jolly, cheerful policeman.

"And what do you gents want?" he chuckled.

"Please, officer, I'm an American cinema star and this is the King of Slovaria. We're missing. We should like to give ourselves up, please!"

The policeman roared with joy. "And w're is Douglas Fairbanks and the Queen of Rooshia? 'Ave you 'idden 'em around the corner?" Seriously: "You lads ought to be ashamed of yourselves, telling such lies! That's wot comes of the likes of you reading the papers. The King and the Yankee lad, I 'ear, were captured at 'Arrow this afternoon. So cut along now. Scat!"

And they scatted, on feet that felt like hot sponges, utterly frightened, overwhelmed by dusk in a forest of petty streets, certain that they would have to go forever till they starved.

"We ought to try to go back to our hotel," sighed Max.

"But it's so far. And I don't believe they'd let us through that gosh-awful gold lobby."

"That's so."

As they crept on, they passed hundreds of agitated newspaper posters which told the world that Their Majesties were still lost. The placards gave Terry his idea.

"Lookit! I guess the papers are always hunting for news. I guess maybe if we went to a newspaper office and told who we were, they might help us get back home. Especially if we went to the London office of an American paper. I can talk American good,

anyway! And I know the office of the New York *Venture* is on Fleet Street."

"I tell you, Terry! Let's find a drinking trough and wash ourselves as well as we can, and then *perhaps* some taxi driver will take us and wait for his fare."

Terry looked at him with hurt astonishment. "Clean up? And lose all that publicity, when they'll be taking our photographs? Why, Mixy!"

"What's publicity?" asked Max humbly.

Discouraged by such ignorance, too tired to explain the metaphysical doctrine, Terry merely grunted, "Come on, we'll start for Fleet Street."

A dozen times they stopped to rest. Once they bathed their feet in a fountain. But at nine that evening, they climbed the stairs to the office of the London bureau of the New York *Venture*.

They found a reception room littered with newspapers and with an office boy who snapped, "Now *get* along!"

But Terry now was Terry Tait again. "Get along, rats! I want to see the boss!" he clamored.

"What's all this?" from an inner door, where stood a sleepy young man in shirt sleeves. His voice was American.

"I'm Terry Tait. This is the King of Slovaria."

The sleepy young man came awake with vigor. He seized Terry's shoulder; peered at him; glanced at Max.

"And I believe you are!" he shouted. "Have you been back to the Picardie?"

"No. We're too dirty. We came here first. We ran away to be pirates, and a man robbed us in Bermondsey of all our money, and we been wandering around there all day, and we came here because my father always reads the *Venture* and—we're hungry!"

"Wait! For heaven's sake!" The man threw a ten-shilling note at the gaping office boy. "Beat it! Get some food! Beans! Ice cream! Champagne! Anything! But make it snappy! Come in here, you kids—I mean, Your Majesty, and you, Terry." He hustled them into his office, threw two chairs in their general direction, and was bellowing into the telephone receiver the number of the central cable office.

Three minutes later a wild telegraph operator slapped on the

desk of the news editor of the *Venture*, in New York, a dispatch reading:

FLASH TAIT KING SLOVARIA GIVE SELVES UP LONDON
BUREAU VENTURE RUNAWAY BE PIRATES BULLETIN
IMMEDIATELY

And sixteen minutes after that newsboys were racing out of the *Venture* building bellowing, "Terry Tait and King found! Terry and King found!"

And half an hour after that, the complete story, with "exclusive interviews" with Terry Tait and H.R.M. the King of Slovaria, was being eagerly read, in various tongues, by excited journalists in Rutland and Raleigh, Barcelona and Budapest, Manila and Madrid.

But the most famous two boys in the world, and the most famous dog, almost, in history, were quietly and unctuously eating ham and cold chicken and sally lunnns, while a wide-awake young man called the Picardie and desired to speak to the suite of the Queen of Slovaria.

In the boudoir of Her Majesty, the Queen of Slovaria, was a scene at once impressive enough for the movies and humble enough for—well, humble enough for the movies.

On Her Majesty's lap sat an American small boy, recently and drastically scrubbed, clad in pajamas and a dressing gown, beatifically eating a most unhygienic and delightful cream roll. Beside them, beaming up at this Madonna scene, was another small boy, also scrubbed, also in dressing gown, also cramming into his mouth the luscious gooey cream. He was petting a woolly dog—a pure-bred Margate Wader—whose tongue lolled out with idiotic contentment.

Facing them was Bessie, smiling over her cigarette. And rushing around faithfully doing nothing in particular was a young Englishman, name of Bundock, who was to be Max's valet in two or three years, after he had been properly trained in the household of Sidonie's dear friend, the Duchess of Twickenham.

Now begins, after the pleasant homeliness, the impressiveness. The duchess began it. She was staring at the family scene; she was tall and gray; she wore rusty black; and within her powerful brain

she was obviously meditating, "This is what comes of treating Slovarians and Americans and all suchlike colonials, no matter how highly placed, as though they were gentry!"

The second touch of impressiveness was given by Prince Sebenéco, Prime Minister of Slovaria.

He was a tall man with a black beard. He was protesting, "But, ma'am, I quite appreciate that it would be an honor for us to entertain Madame Tait and her charming son, but your people, ma'am; they were highly agitated by His Majesty's disappearance, and I fear they would resent your bringing His Majesty's associate in this idiot—I mean, in this adventure. How alarmed I was you may deduce from my having taken an airplane. Eeee! A nasty device! I was very sick!"

The same assistant manager who had once found Bessie her room was ushered in, bowing, timidly venturing, "A cablegram for you, Madame Tait."

Bessie opened the cablegram. She smiled slightly, and sniffed.

"Sebenéco!" said Sidonie.

"Ma'am?"

"You're a fool!"

"I?"

"Exactly. . . . Bessie, my friend, Terry and you will come to Slovaria. He will be educated by my son's tutors. You will both become Slovarian citizens. Some day he will be a general. We will bestow on him a title. Good! In two weeks we start for Tzetokoskavar. Do you play piquet, Bessie? I am very fond of piquet."

"Well, that's real nice of you, Sidonie," yawned Bessie, "and some day Terry and I will sure be glad to come over and visit you, but now we've got to beat it back to California. Just had a cablegram from Abe Granville, our manager. Well, I guess everybody better go to bed."

In their room she showed Terry the cablegram from Granville.

CONGRATULATIONS SWELLEST PUBLICITY EVER PULLED GIVE
YOU CONTRACT FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND A YEAR HUSTLE
BACK START MAKING MAJESTY JUNIOR EIGHTEENTH ABE

In the Hollywood studio of the Jupiter-Triumph-Tait Film Corporation they were shooting *His Majesty, Junior*, which was to be

the first realistic, intimate, low-down picture of the inside life of royalty that had ever been made.

His Majesty, Terry, sat on a throne at the end of a vast room, and before him stood a squadron of guards, saluting.

The director was outlining the opening scene to Terry. "You sit on a throne in the throne room, see? The prime minister stands beside you, see, he's the comedy character, see, and there's a big gang of guards in fur hats, saluting. You don't like the way one of them acts and you say, 'Off with his head.'"

"Aw, thunder; kings can't say, 'Off with his head,'" complained Terry.

"Now, you, Terence Tait, will you kindly shut up and do what you're told?" said Bessie. "Here we work and slave and try to educate you, and then you just go on being so iggorent!"

"Listen, will you?" demanded the director, while Terry wistfully stroked the head of a broad-backed mongrel dog. "You wear a regular king's uniform, see—red tights and a jacket with fur—and you carry a sword."

And the splendid labor of making a great realistic movie went on—while seven thousand miles away a lonely small boy in a palace garden studied Latin and meditated on the day when Terry and he would both be twenty-one, when they would escape from the awful respectability of being kings and celebrities.

Out on the lot, Mr. T. Benescoten Tait was talking to an obsequious extra man. Mr. Tait was wearing a sulphur-colored topcoat and a salmon-colored tie which his wife had brought him from London.

"Yes, sir!" chanted Mr. Tait. "We wouldn't let the newspapers have the real low-down on Terry's chummin' around with the King of Slovaria. You see, this-here is a democratic country, this United States, I mean, and folks might not like it if they knew that their heroes, like Terry, was just like this with royalty. But fact is, this was all bunk about him and the King bumming around in old clothes. Fact is, they was introduced in London by special request of Queen Sidonie—she's always been crazy about Terry's pictures. And then the two kids, they were taken up to this Sandelham Castle by King George of England—yes, sir, that's the real fact."

At the same moment, on the same lot, two other extra men were discoursing, and one of them was explaining:

"Terry and the King! Say, lissen, where was you brought up? Gosh, you certainly are an easy mark! Mean to say you believe all this stuff about this Tait kid being chummy with a king? Say, that was all just publicity. I *know*.

"Wiggins, the press agent, told me so himself. Don't tell anybody—I wouldn't tell anybody but you; I don't want this to go any further—but the fact is, Terry and this kid king never met at all.

"These pictures you see of the two of 'em together, in them dirty clothes, is all fake! Wiggins was there in London, and he got hold of a kid that looked like this king, and had him and Terry photographed together."

"Gee, life's cer'nly different from what you'd expect," said his companion.

"Ain't it, though? You said it!"

GIGOLO AND GIGOLETTE



W. Somerset Maugham

THE BAR was crowded. Sandy Westcott had had a couple of cocktails, and he was beginning to feel hungry. He looked at his watch. He had been asked to dinner at half past nine, and it was nearly ten. Eva Barrett was always late, and he would be lucky if he got anything to eat by ten-thirty. He turned to the barman to order another cocktail and caught sight of a man who at that moment came up to the bar.

"Hullo, Cotman," he said. "Have a drink."

"I don't mind if I do, sir."

Cotman was a nice-looking fellow, of thirty perhaps, short, but with so good a figure that he did not look it, very smartly dressed in a double-breasted dinner jacket, a little too much waisted, and a butterfly tie a good deal too large. He had a thick mat of black, wavy hair, very sleek and shiny, brushed straight back from his

forehead, and large flashing eyes. He spoke with great refinement, but with a Cockney accent.

"How's Stella?" asked Sandy.

"Oh, she's all right. Likes to have a lay-down before the show, you know. Steadies the old nerves, she says."

"I wouldn't do that stunt of hers for a thousand pounds."

"I don't suppose you would. No one can do it but her, not from that height, I mean, and only five foot of water."

"It's the most sick-making thing I've ever seen."

Cotman gave a little laugh. He took this as a compliment. Stella was his wife. Of course she did the trick and took the risk, but it was he who had thought of the flames, and it was the flames that had taken the public fancy and made the turn the huge success it was. Stella dived into a tank from the top of a ladder sixty feet high, and, as he said, there were only five feet of water in the tank. Just before she dived they poured enough petrol on to cover the surface and he set it alight; the flames soared up and she dived straight into them.

"Paco Espinel tells me it's the biggest draw the Casino has ever had," said Sandy.

"I know, he told me they'd served as many dinners in July as they generally do in August. 'And that's you,' he says to me."

"Well, I hope you're making a packet."

"Well, I can't exactly say that. You see, we've got our contract, and naturally we didn't know it was going to be a riot, but Mr. Espinel's talking of booking us for next month, and I don't mind telling you he's not going to get us on the same terms or anything like it. Why, I had a letter from an agent only this morning saying they wanted us to go to Deauville."

"Here are my people," said Sandy.

He nodded to Cotman and left him. Eva Barrett sailed in with the rest of her guests. She had gathered them together downstairs. It was a party of eight.

"I knew we should find you here, Sandy," she said. "I'm not late, am I?"

"Only half an hour."

"Ask them what cocktails they want, and then we'll dine."

While they were standing at the bar, emptying now, for nearly everyone had gone down to the terrace for dinner, Paco Espinel passed through and stopped to shake hands with Eva Barrett. Paco

Espinel was a young man who had run through his money and now made his living by arranging the turns with which the Casino sought to attract visitors. It was his duty to be civil to the rich and great. Mrs. Chaloner Barrett was an American widow of vast wealth; she not only entertained expensively, but also gambled. And after all, the dinners and suppers and the two cabaret shows that accompanied them were provided only to induce people to lose their money at the tables.

"Got a good table for me, Paco?" said Eva Barrett.

"The best." His eyes, fine, dark Argentine eyes, expressed his admiration of Mrs. Barrett's opulent, aging charms. This also was business. "You've seen Stella?"

"Of course. Three times. It's the most terrifying thing I've ever seen."

"Sandy comes every night."

"I want to be in at the death. She's bound to kill herself one of these nights, and I don't want to miss that if I can help it."

Paco laughed.

"She's been such a success, we're going to keep her on another month. All I ask is that she shouldn't kill herself till the end of August. After that she can do as she likes."

"Oh, God, have I got to go on eating trout and roast chicken every night till the end of August?" cried Sandy.

"You brute, Sandy," said Eva Barrett. "Come on, let's go in to dinner. I'm starving."

Paco Espinel asked the barman if he'd seen Cotman. The barman said he'd had a drink with Mr. Westcott.

"Oh, well, if he comes in here again, tell him I want a word with him."

Mrs. Barrett paused at the top of the steps that led down to the terrace long enough for the press representative, a little haggard woman with an untidy head, to come up with her notebook. Sandy whispered the names of the guests. It was a representative Riviera party. There was an English lord and his lady, long and lean both of them, who were prepared to dine with anyone who would give them a free meal. They were certain to be as tight as drums before midnight. There was a gaunt Scotch woman, with a face like a Peruvian mask that has been battered by the storms of ten centuries, and her English husband. Though a broker by profession, he was bluff, military and hearty. He gave you an impression of

such integrity that you were almost more sorry for him than for yourself when the good thing he had put you onto as a special favor turned out to be a dud. There was an Italian countess who was neither Italian nor a countess, but played a beautiful game of bridge, and there was a Russian prince who was ready to make Mrs. Barrett a princess and in the meantime sold champagne, motorcars and Old Masters on commission. A dance was in progress, and Mrs. Barrett, waiting for it to end, surveyed, with a look which her short upper lip made scornful, the serried throng on the dance floor. It was a gala night, and the dining tables were crowded together. Beyond the terrace the sea was calm and silent. The music stopped, and the head waiter, affably smiling, came up to guide her to her table. She swept down the steps with majestic gait.

"We shall have quite a good view of the dive," she said as she sat down.

"I like to be next door to the tank," said Sandy, "so that I can see her face."

"Is she pretty?" asked the Countess.

"It's not that. It's the expression of her eyes. She's scared to death every time she does it."

"Oh, I don't believe that," said the City gentleman, Colonel Goodhart by name, though no one had ever discovered how he came by the title. "I mean, the whole bally stunt's only a trick. There's no danger really, I mean."

"You don't know what you're talking about. Diving from that height in as little water as that, she's got to turn like a flash the moment she touches the water. And if she doesn't do it right she's bound to bash her head against the bottom and break her back."

"That's just what I'm telling you, old boy," said the Colonel, "it's a trick. I mean, there's no argument."

"If there's no danger there's nothing to it, anyway," said Eva Barrett. "It's over in a minute. Unless she's risking her life it's the biggest fraud of modern times. Don't say we've come to see this over and over again and it's only a fake."

"Pretty well everything is. You can take my word for that."

"Well, you ought to know," said Sandy.

If it occurred to the Colonel that this might be a nasty dig, he admirably concealed it. He laughed.

"I don't mind saying I know a thing or two," he admitted. "I

mean, I've got my eyes peeled all right. You can't put much over on me."

The tank was on the far left of the terrace, and behind it, supported by stays, was an immensely tall ladder at the top of which was a tiny platform. After two or three dances more, when Eva Barrett's party were eating asparagus, the music stopped and the lights were lowered. A spot was turned on the tank. Cotman was visible in the brilliance. He ascended half a dozen steps so that he was on a level with the top of the tank.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried out, in a loud clear voice, "you are now going to see the most marvelous feat of the century. Madame Stella, the greatest diver in the world, is about to dive from a height of sixty feet into a lake of flames five foot deep. This is a feat that has never been performed before, and Madame Stella is prepared to give one hundred pounds to anyone who will attempt it. Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor to present Madame Stella."

A little figure appeared at the top of the steps that led onto the terrace, ran quickly up to the tank, and bowed to the applauding audience. She wore a man's silk dressing gown and on her head a bathing cap. Her thin face was made up as if for the stage. The Italian countess looked at her through her *face-à-main*.

"Not pretty," she said.

"Good figure," said Eva Barrett. "You'll see."

Stella slipped out of her dressing gown and gave it to Cotman. He went down the steps. She stood for a moment and looked at the crowd. They were in darkness and she could only see vague white faces and white shirt fronts. She was small, beautifully made, with legs long for her body and slim hips. Her bathing costume was very scanty.

"You're quite right about the figure, Eva," said the Colonel. "Bit undeveloped, of course, but I know you girls think that's quite the thing."

Stella began to climb the ladder, and the spotlight followed her. It seemed an incredible height. An attendant poured petrol on the surface of the water. Cotman was handed a flaming torch. He watched Stella reach the top of the ladder and settle herself on the platform.

"Ready?" he cried.

"Yes."

"Go," he shouted.

And as he shouted he seemed to plunge the burning torch into the water. The flames sprang up, leaping high, and really terrifying to look at. At the same moment Stella dived. She came down like a streak of lightning and plunged through the flames, which subsided a moment after she had reached the water. A second later she was at the surface and jumped out to a roar, a storm of applause. Cotman wrapped the dressing gown round her. She bowed and bowed. The applause went on. Music struck up. With a final wave of the hand she ran down the steps and between the tables to the door. The lights went up, and the waiters hurried along with their neglected service.

Sandy Wescott gave a sigh. He did not know whether he was disappointed or relieved.

"Top-hole," said the English peer.

"It's a bally fake," said the Colonel, with his British pertinacity. "I bet you anything you like."

"It's over so quickly," said her English ladyship. "I mean, you don't get your money's worth really."

Anyhow, it wasn't her money. That it never was. The Italian countess leaned forward. She spoke fluent English, but with a strong accent.

"Eva, my darling, who are those extraordinary people at the table near the door under the balcony?"

"Packet of fun, aren't they?" said Sandy. "I simply haven't been able to take my eyes off them."

Eva Barrett glanced at the table the Countess indicated, and the Prince, who sat with his back to it, turned round to look.

"They can't be true," cried Eva. "I must ask Angelo who they are."

Mrs. Barrett was the sort of woman who knew the head waiter of all the principal restaurants in Europe by their first names. She told the waiter who was at that moment filling her glass to send Angelo to her.

It was certainly an odd pair. They were sitting by themselves at a small table. They were very old. The man was big and stout with a mass of white hair, great bushy white eyebrows and an enormous white mustache. He looked like the late King Humber

of Italy, but much more like a king. He sat bolt upright. He wore full evening dress, with a white tie and a collar that has been out of fashion for hard on thirty years. His companion was a little old lady in a black satin ball dress, cut very low and tight at the waist. Round her neck were several chains of colored beads. She wore what was obviously a wig, and a very ill-fitting one at that; it was very elaborate, all curls and sausages, and raven black. She was outrageously made up, bright blue under the eyes and on the eyelids, the eyebrows heavily black, a great patch of very pink rouge on each cheek and the lips a livid scarlet. The skin hung loosely on her face in deep wrinkles. She had large bold eyes, and they darted eagerly from table to table. She was taking everything in, and every other minute called the old man's attention to someone or other. The appearance of the couple was so fantastic in that fashionable crowd, the men in dinner jackets, the women in thin, pale-colored frocks, that many eyes were turned on them. The staring did not seem to incommode the old lady. When she felt certain persons were looking at her she raised her eyebrows archly, smiled and rolled her eyes. She seemed on the point of acknowledging applause.

Angelo hurried up to the good customer that Eva Barrett was. "You wished to see me, my lady?"

"Oh, Angelo, we're simply dying to know who those absolutely marvelous people are at the table next to the door."

Angelo gave a look and then assumed a deprecating air. The expression of his face, the movement of his shoulders, the turn of his spine, the gesture of his hands, probably even the twiddle of his toes, all indicated a half-humorous apology.

"You must overlook them, my lady." He knew of course that Mrs. Barrett had no right to be thus addressed, just as he knew that the Italian countess was neither Italian nor a countess and that the English lord never paid for a drink if anyone else would pay for it, but he also knew that to be thus addressed did not displease her. "They begged me to give them a table because they wanted to see Madame Stella do her dive. They were in the profession themselves once. I know they're not the sort of people one expects to see dining here, but they made such a point of it I simply hadn't the heart to refuse."

"But I think they're a perfect scream. I adore them."

"I've know them for many years. The man indeed is a compatriot of mine." The head waiter gave a condescending little laugh. "I told them I'd give them a table on the condition that they didn't dance. I wasn't taking any risks, my lady."

"Oh, but I should have loved to see them dance."

"One has to draw the line somewhere, my lady," said Angelo gravely.

He smiled, bowed again and withdrew.

"Look," cried Sandy, "they're going."

The funny old couple were paying their bill. The old man got up and put round his wife's neck a large white, but not too clean, feather boa. She rose. He gave her his arm, holding himself very erect, and she, small in comparison, tripped out beside him. Her black satin dress had a long train, and Eva Barrett (who was well over fifty) screamed with joy.

"Look, I remember my mother wearing a dress like that when I was in the schoolroom."

The comic pair walked, still arm in arm, through the spacious rooms of the Casino till they came to the door. The old man addressed a commissionaire.

"Be so good as to direct me to the artistes' dressing rooms. We wish to pay our respects to Madame Stella."

The commissionaire gave them a look and summed them up. They were not people with whom it was necessary to be very polite.

"You won't find her there."

"She has not gone? I thought she gave a second performance at two."

"That's true. They might be in the bar."

"It won't 'urt us just to go an' 'ave a look, Carlo," said the old lady.

"Right-o, my love," he answered with a great roll of the R.

They walked slowly up the great stairs and entered the bar. It was empty but for the deputy barman and a couple sitting in two armchairs in the corner. The old lady released her husband's arm and tripped up with outstretched hands.

"Ow are you, dear? I felt I just 'ad to come and congratulate you, bein' English same as you are. And in the profession meself. It's a grand turn, my dear, it deserves to be a success." She turned to Cotman. "And is this your 'usband?"

Stella got out of her armchair and a shy smile broke on her lips as she listened with some confusion to the voluble old lady.

"Yes, that's Syd."

"Pleased to meet you," he said.

"And this is mine," said the old lady, with a little dig of the elbow in the direction of the tall, white-haired man. "Mr. Penezzi. 'E's a count really, and I'm the Countess Penezzi by rights, but when we retired from the profession we dropped the title."

"Will you have a drink?" said Cotman.

"No, you 'ave one with us," said Mrs. Penezzi, sinking into an armchair. "Carlo, you order."

The barman came, and after some discussion three bottles of beer were ordered. Stella would not have anything.

"She never has anything till after the second show," explained Cotman.

Stella was slight and small, about twenty-six, with light-brown hair, cut short and waved, and gray eyes. She had reddened her lips, but wore little rouge on her face. Her skin was pale. She was not very pretty, but she had a neat little face. She wore a very simple evening frock of white silk. The beer was brought, and Mr. Penezzi, evidently not very talkative, took a long swig.

"What was your line?" asked Syd Cotman politely.

Mrs. Penezzi gave him a rolling glance of her flashing, made-up eyes and turned to her husband.

"Tell 'em who I am, Carlo," she said.

"The 'uman cannon ball," he announced.

Mrs. Penezzi smiled brightly and with a quick, birdlike glance looked from one to the other. They stared at her in dismay.

"Flora," she said. "The 'uman cannon ball."

She so obviously expected them to be impressed that they did not quite know what to do. Stella gave her Syd a puzzled look. He came to the rescue.

"It must have been before our time."

"Naturally it was before your time. Why, we retired from the profession definitely the year poor Queen Victoria died. It made quite a sensation when we did, too. But you've 'eard of me, of course." She saw the blank look on their faces; her tone changed a little. "But I was the biggest draw in London. At the Old Aquarium, that was. All the swells came to see me. The Prince of Wales

and I don't know who all. I was the talk of the town. Isn't that true, Carlo?"

"She crowded the Aquarium for a year."

"It was the most spectacular turn they'd ever 'ad there. Why, only a few years ago I went up and introduced meself to Lady de Bathe. Lily Langtry, you know. She used to live down 'ere. She remembered me perfectly. She told me she'd seen me ten times."

"What did you do?" asked Stella.

"I was fired out of a cannon. Believe me, it was a sensation. And after London I went all over the world with it. Yes, my dear, I'm an old woman now and I won't deny it. Seventy-eight Mr. Penezzi is, and I shall never see seventy again, but I've 'ad me portrait on every 'oardin' in London. Lady de Bathe said to me: 'My dear, you was as celebrated as I was.' But you know what the public is, give 'em a good thing and they go mad over it, only they want change; 'owever good it is, they get sick of it, and then they won't go and see it any more. It'll 'appen to you, my dear, same as it 'appened to me. It comes to all of us. But Mr. Penezzi always 'ad 'is 'ead screwed on 'is shoulders the right way. Been in the business since 'e was so 'igh. Circus, you know. Ringmaster. That's 'ow I first knew 'im. I was in a troupe of acrobaks. Trapeze act, you know. 'E's a fine-lookin' man now, but you should 'ave seen 'im then, in 'is Russian boots, and ridin' breeches, and a tight-fittin' coat with frogs all down the front of it, crackin' 'is long whip as 'is 'orses galloped round the ring, the 'andsomest man I ever see in my life."

Mr. Penezzi did not make any remark, but thoughtfully twisted his immense white mustache.

"Well, as I was tellin' you, 'e was never one to throw money about and when the agents couldn't get us bookin's any more 'e said, 'Let's retire.' And 'e was quite right, after 'avin' been the biggest star in London, we couldn't go back to circus work any more, I mean, Mr. Penezzi bein' a count 'really, 'e 'ad 'is dignity to think of, so we come down 'ere and we bought a 'ouse and started a pension. It always 'ad been Mr. Penezzi's ambition to do something like that. Thirty-five years we been 'ere now. We 'aven't done so badly, not until the last two or three years, and the slump came, though visitors are very different from what they was when we first started, the things they want, electric light and runnin'

water in their bedrooms and I don't know what all. Give them a card, Carlo. Mr. Penezzi does the cookin' 'imself, and if ever you want a real 'ome from 'ome, you'll know where to find it. I like professional people, and we'd 'ave a rare lot to talk about, you and me, dearie. Once a professional always a professional, I say."

At that moment the head barman came back from his supper. He caught sight of Syd.

"Oh, Mr. Cotman, Mr. Espinel was looking for you, wants to see you particularly."

"Oh, where is he?"

"You'll find him around somewhere."

"We'll be going," said Mrs. Penezzi, getting up. "Come and 'ave lunch with us one day, will you? I'd like to show you my old photographs and me press cuttin's. Fancy you not 'avin' 'eard of the 'uman cannon ball. Why, I was as well known as the Tower of London."

Mrs. Penezzi was not vexed at finding that these young people had never even heard of her. She was simply amused.

They bade one another good-by, and Stella sank back again into her chair.

"I'll just finish my beer," said Syd, "and then I'll go and see what Paco wants. Will you stay here, ducky, or would you like to go to your dressing room?"

Stella's hands were tightly clenched. She did not answer. Syd gave her a look and then quickly glanced away.

"Perfect riot, that old girl," he went on, in his hearty way. "Real figure of fun. I suppose it's true what she said. It's difficult to believe, I must say. Fancy 'er drawing all London, what, forty years ago? And the funny thing is, her thinking anybody remembered. Seemed as though she simply couldn't understand us not having heard of her even."

He gave Stella another glance, from the corner of his eye so that she should not see he was looking at her, and he saw she was crying. He faltered. The tears were rolling down her pale face. She made no sound.

"What's the matter, darling?"

"Syd, I can't do it again tonight," she sobbed.

"Why on earth not?"

"I'm afraid."

He took her hand.

"I know you better than that," he said. "You're the bravest little woman in the world. Have a brandy, that'll pull you together."

"No, that'd only make it worse."

"You can't disappoint your public like that."

"That filthy public. Swine who eat too much and drink too much. A pack of chattering fools with more money than they know what to do with. I can't stick them. What do they care if I risk my life?"

"Of course it's the thrill they come for, there's no denying that," he replied uneasily. "But you know and I know, there's no risk, not if you keep your nerve."

"But I've lost my nerve, Syd. I shall kill myself."

She had raised her voice a little, and he looked round quickly at the barman. But the barman was reading the *Eclaireur de Nice* and paying no attention.

"You don't know what it looks like from up there, the top of the ladder, when I look down at the tank. I give you my word, tonight I thought I was going to faint. I tell you I can't do it again tonight, you've got to get me out of it, Syd."

"If you funk it tonight it'll be worse tomorrow."

"No, it won't. It's having to do it twice kills me. The long wait and all that. You go and see Mr. Espinel and tell him I can't give two shows a night. It's more than my nerves'll stand."

"He'll never stand for that. The whole supper trade depends on you. It's only to see you they come in then at all."

"I can't help it, I tell you I can't go on."

He was silent for a moment. The tears still streamed down her pale little face, and he saw that she was quickly losing control of herself. He had felt for some days that something was up, and he had been anxious. He had tried not to give her an opportunity to talk. He knew obscurely that it was better for her not to put into words what she felt. But he had been worried. For he loved her.

"Anyhow, Espinel wants to see me," he said.

"What about?"

"I don't know. I'll tell him you can't give the show more than once a night and see what he says. Will you wait here?"

"No, I'll go along to the dressing room."

Ten minutes later he found her there. He was in great spirits and his step was jaunty. He burst open the door.

"I've got grand news for you, honey. They're keeping us on next month at twice the money."

He sprang forward to take her in his arms and kiss her, but she pushed him away.

"Have I got to go on again tonight?"

"I'm afraid you must. I tried to make it only one show a night, but he wouldn't hear of it. He says it's quite essential you should do the supper turn. And after all, for double the money, it's worth it."

She flung herself down on the floor and this time burst into a storm of tears.

"I can't, Syd, I can't. I shall kill myself."

He sat down on the floor and raised her head and took her in his arms and petted her.

"Buck up, darling. You can't refuse a sum like that. Why, it'll keep us all the winter, and we shan't have to do a thing. After all there are only four more days to the end of July, and then it's only August."

"No, no, no. I'm frightened. I don't want to die, Syd. I love you."

"I know you do, darling, and I love you. Why, since we married I've never looked at another woman. We've never had money like this before, and we shall never get it again. You know what these things are, we're a riot now, but we can't expect it to go on forever. We've got to strike while the iron's hot."

"D'you want me to die, Syd?"

"Don't talk so silly. Why, where should I be without you? You mustn't give way like this. You've got your self-respect to think of. You're famous all over the world."

"Like the human cannon ball was," she cried with a laugh of fury.

"That damned old woman," he thought.

He knew that was the last straw. Bad luck, Stella taking it like that.

"That was an eye-opener to me," she went on. "What do they come and see me over and over again for? On the chance they'll see me kill myself. And a week after I'm dead they'll have forgotten even my name. That's what the public is. When I looked at that painted old hag I saw it all. Oh, Syd, I'm so miserable." She threw

her arms round his neck and pressed her face to his. "Syd, it's no good, I can't do it again."

"Tonight, d'you mean? If you really feel like that about it, I'll tell Espinel you've had a fainting fit. I daresay it'll be all right just for once."

"I don't mean tonight, I mean never."

She felt him stiffen a little.

"Syd dear, don't think I'm being silly. It's not just today, it's been growing on me. I can't sleep at night thinking of it, and when I do drop off I see myself standing at the top of the ladder and looking down. Tonight I could hardly get up it, I was trembling so, and when you lit the flames and said go, something seemed to be holding me back. I didn't even know I'd jumped. My mind was a blank till I found myself on the platform and heard them clapping. Syd, if you loved me you wouldn't want me to go through such torture."

He sighed. His own eyes were wet with tears. For he loved her devotedly.

"You know what it means," he said. "The old life. Marathons and all."

"Anything's better than this."

The old life. They both remembered it. Syd had been a dancing gigolo since he was eighteen. He was very good-looking in his dark Spanish way and full of life. Old women and middle-aged women were glad to pay to dance with him, and he was never out of work. He had drifted from England to the Continent, and there he had stayed, going from hotel to hotel, to the Riviera in the winter, to watering places in France in the summer. It wasn't a bad life they led. There were generally two or three of them together, the men, and they shared a room in cheap lodgings. They didn't have to get up till late, and they only dressed in time to go to the hotel at twelve to dance with stout women who wanted to get their weight down. Then they were free till five, when they went to the hotel again and sat at a table, the three of them together, keeping a sharp eye open for anyone who looked a likely client. They had their regular customers. At night they went to the restaurant, and the house provided them with quite a decent meal.

Between the courses they danced. It was good money. They generally got fifty or a hundred francs from anyone they danced with. Sometimes a rich woman, after dancing a good deal with

one of them for two or three nights, would give him as much as a thousand francs. Sometimes a middle-aged woman would ask one to spend a night with her, and he would get two hundred and fifty francs for that. There was always the chance of a silly old fool losing her head, and then there were platinum and sapphire rings, cigarette cases, clothes and a wrist watch to be got. One of Syd's friends had married one of them who was old enough to be his mother, but she gave him a car and money to gamble with, and they lived in a beautiful villa at Biarritz. Those were the good days when everybody had money to burn. The slump came and hit the gigolos hard. The hotels were empty, and the clients didn't seem to want to pay for the pleasure of dancing with a nice-looking young fellow. Often and often Syd passed a whole day without earning the price of a drink, and more than once a fat old girl who weighed a ton had had the nerve to give him ten francs. His expenses didn't go down, for he had to be smartly dressed or the manager of the hotel made remarks, washing cost a packet, and you'd be surprised the amount of linen he needed; then shoes, those floors were terribly hard on shoes, and they had to look new. He had his room to pay for and his lunch.

It was then he met Stella. It was at Evian, and the season was disastrous. She was a swimming instructress. She was Australian and a beautiful diver. She gave exhibitions every morning and afternoon. At night she was engaged to dance at the hotel. They dined together at a little table in the restaurant apart from the guests, and when the band began to play they danced together to induce the customers to come onto the floor. But often no one followed them and they danced by themselves. Neither of them got anything much in the way of paying partners. They fell in love with one another, and at the end of the season got married.

They had never regretted it. They had gone through hard times. Even though for business reasons (elderly ladies didn't so much like the idea of dancing with a married man when his wife was there), they concealed their marriage, it was not so easy to get a hotel job for the pair of them, and Syd was far from being able to earn enough to keep Stella, even in the most modest pension, without working. The gigolo business had gone to pot. They went to Paris and learned a dancing act, but the competition was fearful and cabaret engagements were very hard to get. Stella was a good ballroom dancer, but the rage was for acrobatics, and

however much they practiced she never managed to do anything startling. The public was sick of the apache turn. They were out of a job for weeks at a time. Syd's wrist watch, his gold cigarette case, his platinum ring, all went up the spout. At last they found themselves in Nice reduced to such straits that Syd had to pawn his evening clothes. It was a catastrophe. They were forced to enter for the Marathon that an enterprising manager was starting. Twenty-four hours a day they danced, resting every hour for fifteen minutes. It was frightful. Their legs ached, their feet were numb. For long periods they were unconscious of what they were doing. They just kept time to the music, exerting themselves as little as possible. They made a little money, people gave them sums of a hundred francs, or two hundred, to encourage them, and sometimes to attract attention they roused themselves to give an exhibition dance. If the public was in a good humor, this might bring in a decent sum. They grew terribly tired. On the eleventh day Stella fainted and had to give up. Syd went on by himself, moving, moving without pause, grotesquely, without a partner. That was the worst time they had ever had. It was the final degradation. It had left with them a recollection of horror and misery.

But it was then that Syd had his inspiration. It had come to him while he was slowly going round the hall by himself. Stella always said she could dive in a saucer. It was just a trick.

"Funny how ideas come," he said afterwards. "Like a flash of lightning."

He suddenly remembered having seen a boy set fire to some petrol that had been spilt on the pavement, and the sudden blaze-up. For of course it was the flames on the water and the spectacular dive into them that had caught the public fancy. He stopped dancing there and then; he was too excited to go on. He talked it over with Stella, and she was enthusiastic. He wrote to an agent who was a friend of his—everyone liked Syd, he was a nice little man—and the agent put up the money for the apparatus. He got them an engagement at a circus in Paris, and the turn was a success. They were made. Engagements followed here and there. Syd bought himself an entire outfit of new clothes, and the climax came when they got a booking for the summer casino on the coast. It was no exaggeration of Syd's when he said that Stella was a riot.

"All our troubles are over, old girl," he said fondly. "We can

put a bit by now for a rainy day, and when the public's sick of this I'll just think of something else."

And now, without warning, at the top of their boom, Stella wanted to chuck it. He didn't know what to say to her. It broke his heart to see her so unhappy. He loved her more now even than when he had married her. He loved her because of all they'd gone through together—after all, for five days once they'd had nothing to eat but a hunk of bread each and a glass of milk—and he loved her because she'd taken him out of all that; he had good clothes to wear again and his three meals a day. He couldn't look at her; the anguish in her dear gray eyes was more than he could bear. Timidly she stretched out her hand and touched his. He gave a deep sigh.

"You know what it means, honey. Our connection in the hotels has gone west, and the business is finished, anyway. What there is'll go to people younger than us. You know what these old women are as well as I do, it's a boy they want, and besides, I'm not tall enough really. It didn't matter so much when I was a kid. It's no good saying I don't look my age, because I do."

"Perhaps we can get into pictures."

He shrugged his shoulders. They'd tried that before when they were down and out.

"I wouldn't mind what I did. I'd serve in a shop."

"D'you think jobs can be had for the asking?"

She began to cry again.

"Don't, honey. It breaks my heart."

"We've got a bit put by."

"I know we have. Enough to last us six months. And then it'll mean starvation. First popping the bits and pieces, and then the clothes'll have to go, same as they did before. And then dancing in low-down joints for our supper and fifty francs a night. Out of a job for weeks together. And Marathons whenever we hear of one. And how long will the public stand for them?"

"I know you think I'm unreasonable, Syd."

He turned and looked at her now. There were tears in her eyes. He smiled, and the smile he gave her was charming and tender.

"No, I don't, ducky. I want to make you happy. After all, you're all I've got. I love you."

He took her in his arms and held her. He could feel the beating

of her heart. If Stella felt like that about it, well, he must just make the best of it. After all, supposing she were killed? No, no, let her chuck it and be damned to the money. She made a little movement.

"What is it, honey?"

She released herself and stood up. She went over to the dressing table.

"I expect it's about time for me to be getting ready," she said.

He started to his feet.

"You're not going to do a show tonight?"

"Tonight, and every night till I kill myself. What else is there? I know you're right, Syd. I can't go back to all that other, stinking rooms in fifth-rate hotels and not enough to eat. Oh, that Marathon. Why did you bring that up? Being tired and dirty for days at a time and then having to give up because flesh and blood just couldn't stand it. Perhaps I can go on another month and then there'll be enough to give you a chance of looking round."

"No, darling, I can't stand for that. Chuck it. We'll manage somehow. We starved before; we can starve again."

She slipped out of her clothes, and for a moment stood naked but for her stockings, looking at herself in the glass. She gave her reflection a hard smile.

"I mustn't disappoint my public," she sniggered.

DRAWING ROOM B



John O'Hara

NOBODY BIG had taken Leda Pentleigh to the train, and the young man from the publicity department who had taken her was not authorized to hire the Rolls or Packard that used to be provided for her New York visits. Nor had they taken their brief ride from the Waldorf to Grand Central. This time, she was riding west on

the *Broadway* and not the *Century*, had come to the station in an ordinary taxicab, from a good but unspectacular hotel north of Sixtieth Street. Mr. Egan, it is true, was dead, but his successor at Penn Station, if any, did not personally escort Leda to the train. She just went along with the pleasant young hundred-and-fifty-a-week man from the publicity department, her eyes cast down in the manner which, after eighteen years, was second nature to her in railroad stations and hotel lobbies, at tennis matches and football games. Nobody stopped her for her autograph, or to swipe the corsage which the publicity young man's boss had sent instead of attending her himself. Pounding her Delman heels on the Penn Station floor, she recalled a remark which she was almost sure she had originated, something about the autograph hounds not bothering her: it was when they didn't bother you that they bothered you. Of course, it was Will Rogers or John Boles or Bill Powell or somebody who first uttered the thought, but Leda preferred her way of putting it. The thought, after all, had been thought by thousands of people, but she noticed it was the way *she* expressed it that was popular among the recent johnny-come-latelies when they were interviewed by the fan magazines. Well, whoever had said it first could have it; she wouldn't quarrel over it. At the moment of marching across Penn Station, there seemed to be mighty few travelers who would take sides for or against her in a controversy over the origin of one of her routine wisecracks; far from saying, "There goes Leda Pentleigh, who first said . . ." the travelers were not even saying, "There goes Leda Pentleigh—period." The few times she permitted her gaze to rise to the height of her fellow man were unsatisfactory: one of the older porters raised his hat and smiled and bowed; two or three nice-appearing men recognized her—but they probably were Philadelphians in their thirties or forties, who would go home and tell their wives that they had seen Leda Pentleigh in Penn Station, and their wives would say, "Oh, yes. I remember her," or "Oh, yes. She was in Katie Hepburn's picture. She played the society bitch, and I'll bet she's qualified." Katie Hepburn, indeed! It wasn't as if Katie Hepburn hadn't been in pictures fifteen years. But no use getting sore at Katie Hepburn because Katie was a few years younger and still a star. At this thought, Leda permitted herself a glance at a Philadelphia-type man, a man who had that look of just about getting into or out of riding togs, as

Leda called them. He frowned a little, then raised his hat, and because he was so obviously baffled, she gave him almost the complete Pentleigh smile. Even then he was baffled, had not the faintest idea who she was. A real huntin'-shootin' dope, and she knew what he was thinking—that here was a woman either from Philadelphia or going to Philadelphia and therefore someone he must know. The gate was opened, and Leda and Publicity went down to her car. Publicity saw that she was, as he said, all squared away, and she thanked him and he left, assuring her that "somebody" from the Chicago office would meet her at Chicago, in case she needed anything. Her car was one of the through cars, which meant she did not have to change trains at Chicago, but just in case she needed anything. (Like what, she said to herself. Like getting up at seven-thirty in the morning to be ready to pose for photographs in the station? Oh, yes? And let every son of a bitch in the Pump Room know that Leda Pentleigh no longer rated the star treatment?)

In her drawing room, Leda decided to leave the door open. There might, after all, be a Coast friend on the train. If she wanted to play gin with him—or her—she could do it, or if she wanted to give her—or him—the brush, she knew how to do that, too. Her window was on the wrong side of the car to watch people on the platform, and she sat in a corner where she could get a good look at the passengers going by her door. She opened a high-class book and watched the public (no longer so completely hers) going by. They all had that beaten look of people trying to find their space; bent over—surely not from the weight of their jewelry boxes and brief cases—and then peering up at the initial on her drawing room, although they could plainly see that the room was occupied by a striking, stunning, chic, glamorous, sophisticated woman, who had spent most of the past week in New York City, wishing she were dead.

She drove that little thought out of her mind. It would do no good now to dwell on that visit, ending now as the train began to pull out—her first visit to New York in four years, and the unhappiest in all her life. What the hell was the use of thinking back to the young punk from one of the dailies who had got her confused with Renée Adorée? What difference the wrong tables in restaurants and the inconveniently timed appointments at hair-

dressers and the night of sitting alone in her hotel room while a forty-dollar pair of theater tickets went to waste? The benefit in Union City, New Jersey. The standup by Ken Englander, the aging architect, who had been glad enough in other days to get once around the floor with her at the Mayfair dances. The being made to wait on the telephone by the New York office of her agent, her own agent. The ruined Sophie dress and the lost earring at that South American's apartment. Why think of those things? Why not think of the pleasanter details of her visit?

Think, for instance, of the nice things that had been said about her on that morning radio program. Her appearance had been for free, but the publicity was said to be valuable, covering the entire metropolitan area and sometimes heard in Pennsylvania. Then there was the swell chat with Ike Bord, publicity man for a company she had once been under contract to. "*Whenner you coming back to us, Leda?* . . . Anything I can do for you while you're in town, only too glad, you know. I didn't even know you were here. Those bums where you are now, they never get anything in the papers." And it was comforting to know she could still charge things at Hattie's, where she had not bought anything in four years. And the amusing taxidriver: "Lady, I made you right away. I siss, 'Lydia Penley. Gay me an autograft fa Harry.' Harry's my kid was killed in the U.S. Marines. Guadalcanal. *Sure, I remember you.*" And, of course, her brother, who had come down all the way from Bridgeport with his wife, bringing Leda *a pair of nylons and a bona-fide cash offer* in case she had a clean car she wasn't using. The telephone service at her hotel had been something extra special because one of the operators formerly had been president of Leda's Brooklyn fan club. Through it all was the knowledge that her train fare and hotel bill were paid for by the company because she obligingly posed for fashion stills for the young-matron departments of the women's magazines, so the whole trip was not costing her more than eight or nine hundred dollars, including the visit to Hattie's. There were some nice things to remember, and she remembered them.

The train rolled through Lancaster County, and it was new country to Leda. It reminded her of the English countryside and of American primitives.

She got up and closed her door once, before washing her hands,

but reopened it when she was comfortable. Traffic in the passage-way had become light. The train conductor and the Pullman conductor came to collect her tickets and asked for her last name. "Leda Pentleigh," she said. This signified nothing to the representative of the Pennsylvania Railroad, but the Pullman conductor said, "Oh, yes, Miss Pentleigh. Hope you have an enjoyable trip," and Leda thanked him and said she was sure she would, lying in her beautiful teeth. She was thinking about sending the porter for a menu when the huntin'-shootin' type stood himself in her doorway and knocked.

"Yes?" she said.

"Could a member of Actors' Equity speak to you for a moment, Miss Pentleigh?" he said. He didn't so much say the line as read it. She knew that much—that rehearsal was behind the words and the way he spoke them.

"To be sure," she said. "Sit down, won't you?"

"Let me introduce myself. My name is Kenyon Littlejohn, which of course doesn't mean anything to you, unless you've *seen* me?"

"I confess I did see you in the station, Mr. Littlejohn. In fact, I almost spoke to you. I thought I recognized you."

He smiled, showing teeth that were a challenge to her own. He took a long gold case out of his inside coat pocket and she took a cigarette. "That can mean two things," he said. "Either you've seen me—I've been around a rather long time, never any terribly good parts. I've usually got the sort of part where I come on and say, 'Hullo, thuh, what's for tea? Oh, crom-pits! How jolly!'" She laughed and he laughed. "Or else you know my almost-double. Man called Crosby? Very Back Bay-Louisburg Square chap from Boston. Whenever I've played Boston, people are always coming up to me and saying, 'Hello, Francis.'"

"Oh, I've met Francis Crosby. He used to come to Santa Barbara and Midwick for the polo."

"That's the chap," said Kenyon Littlejohn, in his gray flannel Brooks suit, Brooks shirt, Peal shoes, Players Club tie, and signet ring. "No wonder you thought you knew me, although I'm a bit disappointed it was Crosby you knew and not me."

"Perhaps I did know you, though. Let me see—"

"No. Please don't. On second thought, the things I've been in—well, the things I've been in have been all right, mostly, but as I

said before, the parts I've had weren't anything I particularly care to remember. Please let me start our acquaintance from scratch."

"All right," she said.

He took a long drag of his cigarette before going on. "I hope you don't think I'm pushy or anything of that sort, Miss Pentleigh, but the fact is I came to ask your advice."

"You mean about acting?" She spoke coldly, so that this insipid hambo wouldn't think he was pulling any age stuff on her.

"Well, hardly that," he said. He spoke as coldly as he dared. "I've very seldom been without work and I've lived quite nicely. My simple needs and wants. No, you see, I've just signed my first picture contract—or, rather, it's almost signed. I'm going out to California to make tests for the older-brother part in *Strange Virgin*."

"Oh, yes. David's doing that, isn't he?"

"Uh—yes. They're paying my expenses and a flat sum to make the test, and, if they like me, a contract. I was wondering, do you think I ought to have an agent out there? I've never had one, you know. Gilbert and Vinton and Brock and the other managers, they usually engage me themselves, a season ahead of time, and I've never *needed* an agent, but everybody tells me out there I ought to have one. Do you agree that that's true?"

"Well, of course, to some extent that depends on how good you are at reading contracts."

"I had a year at law school, Miss Pentleigh. That part doesn't bother me. It's the haggling over money that goes on out there, and I understand none of the important people deal directly with the producers."

"Oh, you're planning on staying?"

"Well . . ."

"New York actors come out just for one picture, or, at least, that's what they say. Of course, they have to protect themselves in case they're floperos in Hollywood. Then they can always say they never planned to stay out there, and come back to New York and pan pictures till the next offer comes along, if it ever does."

"Yes, that's true," said Mr. Littlejohn.

"*That place,*' they say. *'They put caps on your teeth and some fat Czechoslovakian that can't speak English tries to tell you how to act in a horse opera,'* forgetting that the fat Czechoslovakian

knows more about acting in his little finger than half the hambos in New York. Nothing *personal*, of course, Mr. Littlejohn."

"Thank you," said Mr. Littlejohn.

"But I've got a bellyful of two-hundred-dollar-a-week Warfields coming out and trying to high-hat us, trying to steal scenes and finding themselves on the cutting-room floor because they don't know the first thing about picture technique, and it serves them right when they find themselves out on their duffs and on the way back to their Algonquins and their truck-garden patches in Jackson Heights or wherever they live. God damn it to hell, making pictures is work!"

"I realize—"

"Don't give me any of that I-realize. Wait'll you've got up at five and sweated out a scene all day and gone to the desert on location and had to chase rattlesnakes before you could go to bed. Find out what it's like and then go back and tell the boys at the Lambs Club. Do that for twenty or fifteen years." She stopped, partly for breath and partly because she didn't know what was making her go on like this.

"But we're not all like that, Miss Pentleigh," said Littlejohn when she did not go on.

His talking reminded her that she had been talking to a human being and not merely voicing her hatred of New York. His being there to hear it all (and to repeat it later, first chance he got) made her angry at him in particular. "I happen to think you are, cef you don't mind. I don't care if you're Lunt and Fontanne or Helen Hayes or Joe Blow from Kokomo—if you don't click in Hollywood, it's because you're not good enough. And, oh, boy, don't those managers come out begging for us people that can't act to do a part in their new show. When they want a name, they want a movie name. Why, in less than a week, I had chances to do half a dozen plays, including a piece of the shows. What good can New York do me, I ask you."

"The satisfaction of a live audience," he said, answering what was not a question. "Playing before a—"

"A live audience! On a big set you play to as many people as some of the turkeys on Broadway. Live audience! Go to a première at Graumann's Chinese or the Cathay Circle and you have people, thousands, waiting there since two o'clock in the afternoon just to get a look at you and hear you say a few words into

the microphone. In New York, they think if they have three hundred people and two cops on horses, they have a crowd. On the Coast, we have better than that at a preview. A *sneak* preview! But of course you wouldn't know what that is."

"Really, Miss Pentleigh, I'm very glad to be going to Hollywood. I didn't have to go if I didn't want to."

"That wasn't your attitude. You sat down here as if you were patronizing me, *me!* And started in talking about agents and producers as if I Hollywood people were pinheads from Mars. Take a good gander at some of the swishes and chisellers on Broadway."

"Oh, I know a lot about them."

"Well, then, what are you asking me for advice for?"

"I'm terribly sorry," he said, and got up and left.

"Yes, and I think you're a bit of a swish yourself," said Leda to the closed door. She got a bottle of Bourbon out of her bag and poured herself a few drinks into double paper cups and rang for the porter.

Presently, a waiter brought a menu, and by that time Leda was feeling fine, with New York a couple of hundred miles and a week and a lifetime behind her. Dinner was served, and she ate everything put before her. She had a few more shots and agreed with her conscience that perhaps she had been a little rough on the actor, but she had to take it out on somebody. He wasn't really too bad, and she forgave him and decided to go out of her way to be nice to him the next time she saw him. She thereupon rang for the porter.

"Yes, ma'am?" said the porter.

"There's a Mr. Entwistle—no, that's not his name. Littlefield. That's it. Littlefield. Mr. Littlefield is on the train. He's going to California. Do you think you could find 'im and ask 'im that I'd tell 'im I'd like to speak to him, please?"

"The gentleman just in here before you had your dinner, ma'am?"

"Yes, that's the one."

"Mr. Littlejohn. He's in this same car, PA29. I'll give him your message, ma'am."

"Do that," she said, handing the waiter a ten-dollar bill.

She straightened her hair, which needed just a little straightening, and assumed her position—languor with dignity—on the Pullman seat, gazed with something between approval and en-

chantment at the darkening Pennsylvania countryside, and looked forward to home, California, and the friends she loved. She could be a help to Mr. Littlejohn (*that* name would have to be changed). She *would* be a help to Mr. Littlejohn. "That I will, that I will," she said.

GLORY IN THE DAYTIME



Dorothy Parker

MR. MURDOCK was one who carried no enthusiasm whatever for plays and their players, and that was too bad, for they meant so much to little Mrs. Murdock. Always she had been in a state of devout excitement over the luminous, free, passionate elect who serve the theatre. And always she had done her wistful worshipping, along with the multitudes, at the great public altars. It is true that once, when she was a particularly little girl, love had impelled her to write Miss Maude Adams a letter beginning "Dearest Peter," and she had received from Miss Adams a miniature thimble inscribed "A kiss from Peter Pan." (That was a day!) And once, when her mother had taken her holiday shopping, a limousine door was held open and there had passed her, as close as *that*, a wonder of sable and violets and round red curls that seemed to tinkle on the air; so, forever after, she was as good as certain that she had been not a foot away from Miss Billie Burke. But until some three years after her marriage, these had remained her only personal experiences with the people of the lights and the glory.

Then it turned out that Miss Noyes, new-come to little Mrs. Murdock's own bridge club, knew an actress. She actually knew an actress; the way you and I know collectors of recipes and members of garden clubs and amateurs of needlepoint.

The name of the actress was Lily Wynton, and it was famous.

She was tall and slow and silvery; often she appeared in the role of a duchess, or of a Lady Pam or an Honorable Moira. Critics recurrently referred to her as "that great lady of our stage." Mrs. Murdock had attended, over years, matinee performances of the Wynton successes. And she had no more thought that she would one day have opportunity to meet Lily Wynton face to face than she had thought—well, than she had thought of flying!

Yet it was not astounding that Miss Noyes should walk at ease among the glamorous. Miss Noyes was full of depths and mystery, and she could talk with a cigarette still between her lips. She was always doing something difficult, like designing her own pajamas, or reading Proust, or modeling torsos in plasticine. She played excellent bridge. She liked little Mrs. Murdock. "Tiny one," she called her.

"How's for coming to tea tomorrow, tiny one?" she said, at a therefore memorable meeting of the bridge club. "Lily Wynton's going to drop up. You might like to meet her."

The words fell so easily that she could not have realized their weight. Lily Wynton was coming to tea. Mrs. Murdock might like to meet her. Little Mrs. Murdock walked home through the early dark, and stars sang in the sky above her.

Mr. Murdock was already at home when she arrived. It required but a glance to tell that for him there had been no singing stars that evening in the heavens. He sat with his newspaper opened at the financial page, and bitterness had its way with his soul. It was not the time to cry happily to him of the impending hospitalities of Miss Noyes; not the time, that is, if one anticipated exclamatory sympathy. Mr. Murdock did not like Miss Noyes. When pressed for a reason, he replied that he just plain didn't like her. Occasionally he added, with a sweep that might have commanded a certain admiration, that all those women made him sick. Usually, when she told him of the temperate activities of the bridge club meetings, Mrs. Murdock kept any mention of Miss Noyes's name from the accounts. She had found that this omission made for a more agreeable evening. But now she was caught in such a sparkling swirl of excitement that she had scarcely kissed him before she was off on her story.

"Oh, Jim," she cried. "Oh, what do you think! Hallie Noyes asked me to tea tomorrow to meet Lily Wynton!"

"Who's Lily Wynton?" he said.

"Ah, Jim," she said. "Ah, really, Jim. Who's Lily Wynton! Who's Greta Garbo, I suppose!"

"She some actress or something?" he said.

Mrs. Murdock's shoulders sagged. "Yes, Jim," she said. "Yes. Lily Wynton's an actress."

She picked up her purse and started slowly toward the door. But before she had taken three steps, she was again caught up in her sparkling swirl. She turned to him, and her eyes were shining.

"Honestly," she said, "it was the funniest thing you ever heard in your life. We'd just finished the last rubber—oh, I forgot to tell you, I won three dollars, isn't that pretty good for me?—and Hallie Noyes said to me, 'Come on in to tea tomorrow. Lily Wynton's going to drop up,' she said. Just like that, she said it. Just as if it was anybody."

"Drop up?" he said. "How can you drop *up*?"

"Honestly, I don't know what I said when she asked me," Mrs. Murdock said. "I suppose I said I'd love to—I guess I must have. But I was so simply— Well, you know how I've always felt about Lily Wynton. Why, when I was a little girl, I used to collect her pictures. And I've seen her in, oh, everything she's ever been in, I should think, and I've read every word about her, and interviews and all. Really and truly, when I think of *meeting* her— Oh, I'll simply die. What on earth shall I say to her?"

"You might ask her how she'd like to try dropping down, for a change," Mr. Murdock said.

"All right, Jim," Mrs. Murdock said. "If that's the way you want to be."

Wearily she went toward the door, and this time she reached it before she turned to him. There were no lights in her eyes.

"It—it isn't so awfully nice," she said, "to spoil somebody's pleasure in something. I was so thrilled about this. You don't see what it is to me, to meet Lily Wynton. To meet somebody like that, and see what they're like, and hear what they say, and maybe get to know them. People like that mean—well, they mean something different to me. They're not like this. They're not like me. Who do I ever see? What do I ever hear? All my whole life, I've wanted to know—I've almost prayed that some day I could meet— Well. All right, Jim."

She went out, and on to her bedroom.

Mr. Murdock was left with only his newspaper and his bitterness for company. But he spoke aloud.

"Drop up!" he said. "Drop *up*,' for God's sake!"

The Murdocks dined, not in silence, but in pronounced quiet. There was something straitened about Mr. Murdock's stillness; but little Mrs. Murdock's was the sweet, far quiet of one given over to dreams. She had forgotten her weary words to her husband, she had passed through her excitement and her disappointment. Luxuriously she floated on innocent visions of days after the morrow. She heard her own voice in future conversations. . . .

I saw Lily Wynton at Hallie's the other day, and she was telling me all about her new play—no, I'm terribly sorry, but it's a secret, I promised her I wouldn't tell anyone the name of it. . . . Lily Wynton dropped up to tea yesterday, and we just got to talking, and she told me the most interesting things about her life; she said she'd never dreamed of telling them to anyone else. . . . Why, I'd love to come, but I promised to have lunch with Lily Wynton. . . . I had a long, long letter from Lily Wynton. . . . Lily Wynton called me up this morning. . . . Whenever I feel blue, I just go and have a talk with Lily Wynton, and then I'm all right again. . . . Lily Wynton told me . . . Lily Wynton and I . . . "Lily," I said to her . . .

The next morning, Mr. Murdock had left for his office before Mrs. Murdock rose. This had happened several times before, but not often. Mrs. Murdock felt a little queer about it. Then she told herself that it was probably just as well. Then she forgot all about it, and gave her mind to the selection of a costume suitable to the afternoon's event. Deeply she felt that her small wardrobe included no dress adequate to the occasion; for, of course, such an occasion had never before arisen. She finally decided upon a frock of dark-blue serge with fluted white muslin about the neck and wrists. It was her style, that was the most she could say for it. And that was all she could say for herself. Blue serge and little white ruffles—that was she.

The very becomingness of the dress lowered her spirits. A nobody's frock, worn by a nobody. She blushed and went hot when she recalled the dreams she had woven the night before, the mad visions of intimacy, of equality, with Lily Wynton. Timidity

turned her heart liquid, and she thought of telephoning Miss Noyes and saying she had a bad cold and could not come. She steadied, when she planned a course of conduct to pursue at tea-time. She would not try to say anything; if she stayed silent, she could not sound foolish. She would listen and watch and worship and then come home, stronger, braver, better, for an hour she would remember proudly all her life.

Miss Noyes's living room was done in the early modern period. There were a great many oblique lines and acute angles, zigzags of aluminum and horizontal stretches of mirror. The color scheme was sawdust and steel. No seat was more than twelve inches above the floor, no table was made of wood. It was, as has been said of larger places, all right for a visit.

Little Mrs. Murdock was the first arrival. She was glad of that; no, maybe it would have been better to have come after Lily Wynton; no, maybe this was right. The maid motioned her toward the living room, and Miss Noyes greeted her in the cool voice and the warm words that were her special combination. She wore black velvet trousers, a red cummerbund, and a white silk shirt, opened at the throat. A cigarette clung to her lower lip, and her eyes, as was her habit, were held narrow against its near smoke.

"Come in, come in, tiny one," she said. "Bless its little heart. Take off its little coat. Good Lord, you look easily eleven years old in that dress. Sit ye doon, here beside of me. There'll be a spot of tea in a jiff."

Mrs. Murdock sat down on the vast, perilously low divan, and, because she was never good at reclining among cushions, held her back straight. There was room for six like her, between herself and her hostess. Miss Noyes lay back, with one ankle flung upon the other knee, and looked at her.

"I'm a wreck," Miss Noyes announced. "I was modeling like a mad thing, all night long. It's taken everything out of me. I was like a thing bewitched."

"Oh, what were you making?" cried Mrs. Murdock.

"Oh, Eve," Miss Noyes said. "I always do Eve. What else is there to do? You must come pose for me some time, tiny one. You'd be nice to do. Ye-es, you'd be very nice to do. My tiny one."

"Why, I—" Mrs. Murdock said, and stopped. "Thank you very much, though," she said.

"I wonder where Lily is," Miss Noyes said. "She said she'd be

here early—well, she always says that. You'll adore her, tiny one. She's really rare. She's a real person. And she's been through perfect hell. God, what a time she's had!"

"Ah, what's been the matter?" said Mrs. Murdock.

"Men," Miss Noyes said. "Men. She never had a man that wasn't a louse." Gloomily she stared at the toe of her flat-heeled patent leather pump. "A pack of lice, always. All of them. Leave her for the first little floozie that comes along."

"But—" Mrs. Murdock began. No, she couldn't have heard right. How could it be right? Lily Wynton was a great actress. A great actress meant romance. Romance meant Grand Dukes and Crown Princes and diplomats touched with gray at the temples and lean, bronzed, reckless Younger Sons. It meant pearls and emeralds and chinchilla and rubies red as the blood that was shed for them. It meant a grim-faced boy sitting in the fearful Indian midnight, beneath the dreary whirring of the *punkahs*, writing a letter to the lady he had seen but once; writing his poor heart out, before he turned to the service revolver that lay beside him on the table. It meant a golden-locked poet, floating face downward in the sea, and in his pocket his last great sonnet to the lady of ivory. It meant brave, beautiful men, living and dying for the lady who was the pale bride of art, whose eyes and heart were soft with only compassion for them.

A pack of lice. Crawling after little floozies; whom Mrs. Murdock swiftly and hazily pictured as rather like ants.

"But—" said little Mrs. Murdock.

"She gave them all her money," Miss Noyes said. "She always did. Or if she didn't, they took it anyway. Took every cent she had, and then spat in her face. Well, maybe she's beginning to learn a little sense now. Oh, there's the bell—that'll be Lily. No, sit ye doon, tiny one. You belong there."

Miss Noyes rose and made for the archway that separated the living room from the hall. As she passed Mrs. Murdock, she stooped suddenly, cupped her guest's round chin, and quickly, lightly kissed her mouth.

"Don't tell Lily," she murmured, very low.

Mrs. Murdock puzzled. Don't tell Lily what? Could Hallie Noyes think that she might babble to the Lily Wynton of these strange confidences about the actress's life? Or did she mean— But she had no more time for puzzling. Lily Wynton stood in the

archway. There she stood, one hand resting on the wooden molding and her body swayed toward it, exactly as she stood for her third-act entrance of her latest play, and for a like half-minute.

You would have known her anywhere, Mrs. Murdock thought. Oh, yes, anywhere. Or at least you would have exclaimed, "That woman looks something like Lily Wynton." For she was somehow different in the daylight. Her figure looked heavier, thicker, and her face—there was so much of her face that the surplus sagged from the strong, fine bones. And her eyes, those famous dark, liquid eyes. They were dark, yes, and certainly liquid, but they were set in little hammocks of folded flesh, and seemed to be set but loosely, so readily did they roll. Their whites, that were visible all around the irises, were threaded with tiny scarlet veins.

I suppose footlights are an awful strain on their eyes, thought little Mrs. Murdock.

Lily Wynton wore, just as she should have, black satin and sables, and long white gloves were wrinkled luxuriously about her wrists. But there were delicate streaks of grime in the folds of her gloves, and down the shining length of her gown there were small, irregularly shaped dull patches; bits of food or drops of drink, or perhaps both, sometime must have slipped their carriers and found brief sanctuary there. Her hat—oh, her hat. It was romance, it was mystery, it was strange, sweet sorrow; it was Lily Wynton's hat, of all the world, and no other could dare it. Black it was, and tilted, and a great soft plume dropped from it to follow her cheek and curl across her throat. Beneath it her hair had the various hues of neglected brass. But oh, her hat.

"Darling!" cried Miss Noyes.

"Angel," said Lily Wynton. "My sweet."

It was that voice. It was that deep, soft, glowing voice. "Like purple velvet," someone had written. Mrs. Murdock's heart beat visibly.

Lily Wynton cast herself upon the steep bosom of her hostess, and murmured there. Across Miss Noyes's shoulder she caught sight of little Mrs. Murdock.

"And who is this?" she said. She disengaged herself.

"That's my tiny one," Miss Noyes said. "Mrs. Murdock."

"What a clever little face," said Lily Wynton. "Clever, clever little face. What does she do, sweet Hallie? I'm sure she writes,

doesn't she? Yes, I can feel it. She writes beautiful, beautiful words. Don't you, child?"

"Oh, no, really I—" Mrs. Murdock said.

"And you must write me a play," said Lily Wynton. "A beautiful, beautiful play. And I will play in it, over and over the world, until I am a very, very old lady. And then I will die. But I will never be forgotten, because of the years I played in your beautiful, beautiful play."

She moved across the room. There was a slight hesitancy, a seeming insecurity, in her step, and when she would have sunk into a chair, she began to sink two inches, perhaps, to its right. But she swayed just in time in her descent, and was safe.

"To write," she said, smiling sadly at Mrs. Murdock, "to write. And such a little thing, for such a big gift. Oh, the privilege of it. But the anguish of it, too. The agony."

"But, you see, I—" said little Mrs. Murdock.

"Tiny one doesn't write, Lily," Miss Noyes said. She threw herself back upon the divan. "She's a museum piece. She's a devoted wife."

"A wife!" Lily Wynton said. "A wife. Your first marriage, child?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Murdock.

"How sweet," Lily Wynton said. "How sweet, sweet, sweet. Tell me, child, do you love him very very much?"

"Why, I—" said little Mrs. Murdock, and blushed. "I've known him for ages," she said.

"You love him," Lily Wynton said. "You love him. And is it sweet to go to bed with him?"

"Oh—" said Mrs. Murdock, and blushed till it hurt.

"The first marriage," Lily Wynton said. "Youth, youth. Yes, when I was your age I used to marry, too. Oh, treasure your love, child, guard it, live in it. Laugh and dance in the love of your man. Until you find out what he's really like."

There came a sudden visitation upon her. Her shoulders jerked upward, her cheeks puffed, her eyes sought to start from their hammocks. For a moment she sat thus, then slowly all subsided into place. She lay back in her chair, tenderly patting her chest. She shook her head sadly, and there was grieved wonder in the look with which she held Mrs. Murdock.

"Gas," said Lily Wynton, in the famous voice. "Gas. Nobody knows what I suffer from it."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Mrs. Murdock said. "Is there anything—"

"Nothing," Lily Wynton said. "There is nothing. There is nothing that can be done for it. I've been everywhere."

"How's for a spot of tea, perhaps?" Miss Noyes said. "It might help." She turned her face toward the archway and lifted up her voice. "Mary! Where the hell's the tea?"

"You don't know," Lily Wynton said, with her grieved eyes fixed on Mrs. Murdock, "you don't know what stomach distress is. You can never, never know, unless you're a stomach sufferer yourself. I've been one for years. Years and years and years."

"I'm terribly sorry," Mrs. Murdock said.

"Nobody knows the anguish," Lily Wynton said. "The agony."

The maid appeared, bearing a triangular tray upon which was set an heroic-sized tea service of bright white china, each piece a hexagon. She set it down on a table within the long reach of Miss Noyes and retired, as she had come, bashfully.

"Sweet Hallie," Lily Wynton said, "my sweet. Tea—I adore it. I worship it. But my distress turns it to gall and wormwood in me. Gall and wormwood. For hours, I should have no peace. Let me have a little, tiny bit of your beautiful, beautiful brandy, instead."

"You really think you should, darling?" Miss Noyes said. "You know—"

"My angel," said Lily Wynton, "it's the only thing for acidity."

"Well," Miss Noyes said. "But do remember you've got a performance tonight." Again she hurled her voice at the archway. "Mary! Bring the brandy and a lot of soda and ice and things."

"Oh, no, my saint," Lily Wynton said. "No, no, sweet Hallie. Soda and ice are rank poison to me. Do you want to freeze my poor, weak stomach? Do you want to kill poor, poor Lily?"

"Mary!" roared Miss Noyes. "Just bring the brandy and a glass." She turned to little Mrs. Murdock. "How's for your tea, tiny one? Cream? Lemon?"

"Cream, if I may, please," Mrs. Murdock said. "And two lumps of sugar, please, if I may."

"Oh, youth, youth," Lily Wynton said. "Youth and love."

The maid returned with an octagonal tray supporting a de-

canter of brandy and a wide, squat, heavy glass. Her head twisted on her neck in a spasm of diffidence.

"Just pour it for me, will you, my dear?" said Lily Wynton. "Thank you. And leave the pretty, pretty decanter here, on this enchanting little table. Thank you. You're so good to me."

The maid vanished, fluttering. Lily Wynton lay back in her chair, holding in her gloved hand the wide, squat glass, colored brown to the brim. Little Mrs. Murdock lowered her eyes to her teacup, carefully carried it to her lips, sipped, and replaced it on its saucer. When she raised her eyes, Lily Wynton lay back in her chair, holding in her gloved hand the wide, squat, colorless glass.

"My life," Lily Wynton said, slowly, "is a mess. A stinking mess. It always has been, and it always will be. Until I am a very, very old lady. Ah, little Clever-Face, you writers don't know what struggle is."

"But really I'm not—" said Mrs. Murdock.

"To write," Lily Wynton said. "To write. To set one word beautifully beside another word. The privilege of it. The blessed, blessed peace of it. Oh, for quiet, for rest. But do you think those Jew bastards would close that play while it's doing a nickel's worth of business? Oh, no. Tired as I am, sick as I am, I must drag along. Oh, child, child, guard your precious gift. Give thanks for it. It is the greatest thing of all. It is the only thing. To write."

"Darling, I told you tiny one doesn't write," said Miss Noyes. "How's for making more sense? She's a wife."

"Ah, yes, she told me. She told me she had perfect, passionate love," Lily Wynton said. "Young love. It is the greatest thing. It is the only thing." She grasped the decanter; and again the squat glass was brown to the brim.

"What time did you start today, darling?" said Miss Noyes.

"Oh, don't scold me, sweet love," Lily Wynton said. "Lily hasn't been naughty. Her wuzzunt naughty dirl 't all. I didn't get up until late, late, late. And though I parched, though I burned, I didn't have a drink until after my breakfast. 'It is for Hallic,' I said." She raised the glass to her mouth, tilted it, and brought it away, colorless.

"Good Lord, Lily," Miss Noyes said. "Watch yourself. You've got to walk on that stage tonight, my girl."

"All the world's a stage," said Lily Wynton. "And all the men

and women merely players. They have their entrance and their exits, and each man in his time plays many parts, his act being seven ages. At first, the infant, mewling and puking—"

"How's the play doing?" Miss Noyes said.

"Oh, lousily," Lily Wynton said. "Lousily, lousily, lousily. But what isn't? What isn't, in this terrible, terrible world? Answer me that." She reached for the decanter.

"Lily, listen," said Miss Noyes. "Stop that. Do you hear?"

"Please, sweet Hallie," Lily Wynton said. "Pretty please. Poor, poor Lily."

"Do you want me to do what I had to do last time?" Miss Noyes said. "Do you want me to strike you, in front of tiny one, here?"

Lily Wynton drew herself high. "You do not realize," she said, icily, "what acidity is." She filled the glass and held it, regarding it as though through a *lorgnon*. Suddenly her manner changed, and she looked up and smiled at little Mrs. Murdock.

"You must let me read it," she said. "You mustn't be so modest."

"Read—" said little Mrs. Murdock.

"Your play," Lily Wynton said. "Your beautiful, beautiful play. Don't think I am too busy. I always have time. I have time for everything. Oh, my God, I have to go to the dentist tomorrow. Oh, the suffering I have gone through with my teeth. Look!" She set down her glass, inserted a gloved forefinger in the corner of her mouth, and dragged it to the side. "Oogh!" she insisted. "Oogh!"

Mrs. Murdock craned her neck shyly, and caught a glimpse of shining gold.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said.

"As wah ee id a me ass ime," Lily Wynton said. She took away her forefinger and let her mouth resume its shape. "That's what he did to me last time," she repeated. "The anguish of it. The agony. Do you suffer with your teeth, little Clever-Face?"

"Why, I'm afraid I've been awfully lucky," Mrs. Murdock said. "I—"

"You don't know," Lily Wynton said. "Nobody knows what it is. You writers—you don't know." She took up her glass, sighed over it, and drained it.

"Well," Miss Noyes said. "Go ahead and pass out, then, darling. You'll have time for a sleep before the theatre."

"To sleep," Lily Wynton said. "To sleep, perchance to dream."

The privilege of it. Oh, Hallie, sweet, sweet Hallie, poor Lily feels so terrible. Rub my head for me, angel. Help me."

"I'll get the Eau de Cologne," Miss Noyes said. She left the room, lightly patting Mrs. Murdock's knee as she passed her. Lily Wynton lay in her chair and closed her famous eyes.

"To sleep," she said. "To sleep, perchance to dream."

"I'm afraid," little Mrs. Murdock began. "I'm afraid," she said, "I really must be going home. I'm afraid I didn't realize how awfully late it was."

"Yes, go, child," Lily Wynton said. She did not open her eyes. "Go to him. Go to him, live in him, love him. Stay with him always. But when he starts bringing them into the house—get out."

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid I didn't quite understand," Mrs. Murdock said.

"When he starts bringing his fancy women into the house," Lily Wynton said. "You must have pride, then. You must go. I always did. But it was always too late then. They'd got all my money. That's all they want, marry them or not. They say it's love, but it isn't. Love is the only thing. Treasure your love, child. Go back to him. Go to bed with him. It's the only thing. And your beautiful, beautiful play."

"Oh, dear," said little Mrs. Murdock. "I—I'm afraid it's really terribly late."

There was only the sound of rhythmic breathing from the chair where Lily Wynton lay. The purple voice rolled along the air no longer.

Little Mrs. Murdock stole to the chair upon which she had left her coat. Carefully she smoothed her white muslin frills, so that they would be fresh beneath the jacket. She felt a tenderness for her frock; she wanted to protect it. Blue serge and little ruffles—they were her own.

When she reached the outer door of Miss Noyes's apartment, she stopped a moment and her manners conquered her. Bravely she called in the direction of Miss Noyes's bedroom.

"Good-by, Miss Noyes," she said. "I've simply got to run. I didn't realize it was so late. I had a lovely time—thank you ever so much."

"Oh, good-by, tiny one," Miss Noyes called. "Sorry Lily went by-by. Don't mind her—she's really a real person. I'll call you

up, tiny one. I want to see you. Now where's that damned cologne?"

"Thank you ever so much," Mrs. Murdock said. She let herself out of the apartment.

Little Mrs. Murdock walked homeward, through the clustering dark. Her mind was busy, but not with memories of Lily Wynton. She thought of Jim; Jim, who had left for his office before she had arisen that morning, Jim, whom she had not kissed good-by. Darling Jim. There were no others born like him. Funny Jim, stiff and cross and silent; but only because he knew so much. Only because he knew the silliness of seeking afar for the glamour and beauty and romance of living. When they were right at home all the time, she thought. Like the Blue Bird, thought little Mrs. Murdock.

Darling Jim. Mrs. Murdock turned in her course, and entered an enormous shop where the most delicate and esoteric of foods were sold for heavy sums. Jim liked red caviar. Mrs. Murdock bought a jar of the shiny, glutinous eggs. They would have cocktails that night, though they had no guests, and the red caviar would be served with them for a surprise, and it would be a little, secret party to celebrate her return to contentment with her Jim, a party to mark her happy renunciation of all the glory of the world. She bought, too, a large, foreign cheese. It would give a needed touch to dinner. Mrs. Murdock had not given much attention to ordering dinner, that morning. "Oh, anything you want, Signe," she had said to the maid. She did not want to think of that. She went on home with her packages.

Mr. Murdock was already there when she arrived. He was sitting with his newspaper opened to the financial page. Little Mrs. Murdock ran in to him with her eyes a-light. It is too bad that the light in a person's eyes is only the light in a person's eyes, and you cannot tell at a look what causes it. You do not know if it is excitement about you, or about something else. The evening before, Mrs. Murdock had run in to Mr. Murdock with her eyes a-light.

"Oh, hello," he said to her. He looked back at his paper, and kept his eyes there. "What did you do? Did you drop up to Hank Noyes's?"

Little Mrs. Murdock stopped right where she was.

"You know perfectly well, Jim," she said, "that Hallie Noyes's first name is Hallie."

"It's Hank to me," he said. "Hank or Bill. Did what's-her-name show up? I mean drop up. Pardon me."

"To whom are you referring?" said Mrs. Murdock, perfectly.

"What's-her-name," Mr. Murdock said. "The movie star."

"If you mean Lily Wynton," Mrs. Murdock said, "she is not a movie star. She is an actress. She is a great actress."

"Well, did she drop up?" he said.

Mrs. Murdock's shoulders sagged. "Yes," she said. "Yes, she was there, Jim."

"I suppose you're going on the stage now," he said.

"Ah, Jim," Mrs. Murdock said. "Ah, Jim, please. I'm not sorry at all I went to Hallie Noyes's today. It was—it was a real experience to meet Lily Wynton. Something I'll remember all my life."

"What did she do?" Mr. Murdock said. "Hang by her feet?"

"She did no such thing!" Mrs. Murdock said. "She recited Shakespeare, if you want to know."

"Oh, my God," Mr. Murdock said. "That must have been great."

"All right, Jim," Mrs. Murdock said. "If that's the way you want to be."

Wearily she left the room and went down the hall. She stopped at the pantry door, pushed it open, and spoke to the pleasant little maid.

"Oh, Signe," she said. "Oh, good evening, Signe. Put these things somewhere, will you? I got them on the way home. I thought we might have them some time."

Wearily little Mrs. Murdock went on down the hall to her bedroom.

ROMANCE IN THE ROARING FORTIES



Damon Runyon

ONLY a rank sucker will think of taking two peeks at Dave the Dude's doll, because while Dave may stand for the first peek, figuring it is a mistake, it is a sure thing he will get sored up at the second peek, and Dave the Dude is certainly not a man to have sored up on you.

But this Waldo Winchester is one hundred percent sucker, which is why he takes quite a number of peeks at Dave's doll. And what is more, she takes quite a number of peeks right back at him. And there you are. When a guy and a doll get to taking peeks back and forth at each other, why, there you are indeed.

This Waldo Winchester is a nice-looking young guy who writes pieces about Broadway for the *Morning Item*. He writes pieces about the goings-on in night clubs, such as fights, and one thing and another, and also about who is running around with who, including guys and dolls.

Sometimes this is very embarrassing to people who may be married and are running around with people who are not married, but of course Waldo Winchester cannot be expected to ask one and all for their marriage certificates before he writes his pieces for the paper.

The chances are if Waldo Winchester knows Miss Billy Perry is Dave the Dude's doll, he will never take more than his first peek at her, but nobody tips him off until after his second or third peek, and by this time Miss Billy Perry is taking her peeks back at him and Waldo Winchester is hooked.

In fact, he is plumb gone, and being a sucker, like I tell you, he does not care whose doll she is. Personally, I do not blame him much, for Miss Billy Perry is worth a few peeks, especially when she is out on the floor of Miss Missouri Martin's Sixteen Hundred Club doing her tap dance. Still, I do not think the best tap-dancer that ever lives can make me take two peeks at her if I know she is Dave the Dude's doll, for Dave somehow thinks more than somewhat of his dolls.

He especially thinks plenty of Miss Billy Perry, and sends her fur coats, and diamond rings, and one thing and another, which she sends back to him at once, because it seems she does not take presents from guys. This is considered most surprising all along Broadway, but people figure the chances are she has some other angle.

Anyway, this does not keep Dave the Dude from liking her just the same, and so she is considered his doll by one and all, and is respected accordingly until this Waldo Winchester comes along.

It happens that he comes along while Dave the Dude is off in the *Modoc* on a little run down to the Bahamas to get some goods for his business, such as Scotch and champagne, and by the time Dave gets back Miss Billy Perry and Waldo Winchester are at the stage where they sit in corners between her numbers and hold hands.

Of course nobody tells Dave the Dude about this, because they do not wish to get him excited. Not even Miss Missouri Martin tells him, which is most unusual because Miss Missouri Martin, who is sometimes called "Mizzoo" for short, tells everything she knows as soon as she knows it, which is very often before it happens.

You see, the idea is when Dave the Dude is excited he may blow somebody's brains out, and the chances are it will be nobody's brains but Waldo Winchester's, although some claim that Waldo Winchester has no brains or he will not be hanging around Dave the Dude's doll.

I know Dave is very, very fond of Miss Billy Perry, because I hear him talk to her several times, and he is most polite to her and never gets out of line in her company by using cuss words, or anything like this. Furthermore, one night when One-eyed Solly Abrahams is a little stewed up he refers to Miss Billy Perry as a

broad, meaning no harm whatever, for this is the way many of the boys speak of the dolls.

But right away Dave the Dude reaches across the table and bops One-eyed Solly right in the mouth, so everybody knows from then on that Dave thinks well of Miss Billy Perry. Of course Dave is always thinking fairly well of some doll as far as this goes, but it is seldom he gets to bopping guys in the mouth over them.

Well, one night what happens but Dave the Dude walks into the Sixteen Hundred Club, and there in the entrance, what does he see but this Waldo Winchester and Miss Billy Perry kissing each other back and forth very friendly. Right away Dave reaches for the old equalizer to shoot Waldo Winchester, but it seems Dave does not happen to have the old equalizer with him, not expecting to have to shoot anybody this particular evening.

So Dave the Dude walks over and as Waldo Winchester hears him coming and lets go his strangle hold on Miss Billy Perry, Dave nails him with a big right hand on the chin. I will say for Dave the Dude that he is a fair puncher with his right hand, though his left is not so good, and he knocks Waldo Winchester bow-legged. In fact, Waldo folds right up on the floor.

Well, Miss Billy Perry lets out a screech you can hear clear to the Battery and runs over to where Waldo Winchester lights, and falls on top of him squalling very loud. All anybody can make out of what she says is that Dave the Dude is a big bum, although Dave is not so big, at that, and that she loves Waldo Winchester.

Dave walks over and starts to give Waldo Winchester the leather, which is considered customary in such cases, but he seems to change his mind, and instead of booting Waldo around, Dave turns and walks out of the joint looking very black and mad, and the next anybody hears of him he is over in the Chicken Club doing plenty of drinking.

This is regarded as a very bad sign indeed, because while everybody goes to the Chicken Club now and then to give Tony Bertazzola, the owner, a friendly play, very few people care to do any drinking there, because Tony's liquor is not meant for anybody to drink except the customers.

Well, Miss Billy Perry gets Waldo Winchester on his pegs again, and wipes his chin off with her handkerchief, and by and

by he is all okay except for a big lump on his chin. And all the time she is telling Waldo Winchester what a big bum Dave the Dude is, although afterwards Miss Missouri Martin gets hold of Miss Billy Perry and puts the blast on her plenty for chasing a two-handed spender such as Dave the Dude out of the joint.

"You are nothing but a little sap," Miss Missouri Martin tells Miss Billy Perry. "You cannot get the right time off this newspaper guy, while everybody knows Dave the Dude is a very fast man with a dollar."

"But I love Mr. Winchester," says Miss Billy Perry. "He is so romantic. He is not a bootlegger and a gunman like Dave the Dude. He puts lovely pieces in the paper about me, and he is a gentleman at all times."

Now of course Miss Missouri Martin is not in a position to argue about gentlemen, because she meets very few in the Sixteen Hundred Club and anyway, she does not wish to make Waldo Winchester mad as he is apt to turn around and put pieces in his paper that will be a knock to the joint, so she lets the matter drop.

Miss Billy Perry and Waldo Winchester go on holding hands between her numbers, and maybe kissing each other now and then, as young people are liable to do, and Dave the Dude plays the chill for the Sixteen Hundred Club and everything seems to be all right. Naturally we are all very glad there is no more trouble over the proposition, because the best Dave can get is the worst of it in a jam with a newspaper guy.

Personally, I figure Dave will soon find himself another doll and forget all about Miss Billy Perry, because now that I take another peek at her, I can see where she is just about the same as any other tap-dancer, except that she is red-headed. Tap-dancers are generally blackheads, but I do not know why.

Moosh, the doorman at the Sixteen Hundred Club, tells me Miss Missouri Martin keeps plugging for Dave the Dude with Miss Billy Perry in a quiet way, because he says he hears Miss Missouri Martin make the following crack one night to her: "Well, I do not see any Simple Simon on your lean and linger."

This is Miss Missouri Martin's way of saying she sees no diamond on Miss Billy Perry's finger, for Miss Missouri Martin is an old experienced doll, who figures if a guy loves a doll he will prove it with diamonds. Miss Missouri Martin has many diamonds

herself, though how any guy can ever get himself heated up enough about Miss Missouri Martin to give her diamonds is more than I can see.

I am not a guy who goes around much, so I do not see Dave the Dude for a couple of weeks, but late one Sunday afternoon little Johnny McGowan, who is one of Dave's men, comes and says to me like this: "What do you think? Dave grabs the scribe a little while ago and is taking him out for an airing!"

Well, Johnny is so excited it is some time before I can get him cooled out enough to explain. It seems that Dave the Dude gets his biggest car out of the garage and sends his driver, Wop Joe, over to the *Item* office where Waldo Winchester works, with a message that Miss Billy Perry wishes to see Waldo right away at Miss Missouri Martin's apartment on Fifty-ninth Street.

Of course this message is nothing but the phonus bolonus, but Waldo drops in for it and gets in the car. Then Wop Joe drives him up to Miss Missouri Martin's apartment, and who gets in the car there but Dave the Dude. And away they go.

Now this is very bad news indeed, because when Dave the Dude takes a guy out for an airing the guy very often does not come back. What happens to him I never ask, because the best a guy can get by asking questions in this man's town is a bust in the nose.

But I am much worried over this proposition, because I like Dave the Dude, and I know that taking a newspaper guy like Waldo Winchester out for an airing is apt to cause talk, especially if he does not come back. The other guys that Dave the Dude takes out for airings do not mean much in particular, but here is a guy who may produce trouble, even if he is a sucker, on account of being connected up with a newspaper.

I know enough about newspapers to know that by and by the editor or somebody will be around wishing to know where Waldo Winchester's pieces about Broadway are, and if there are no pieces from Waldo Winchester, the editor will wish to know why. Finally it will get around to where other people will wish to know, and after a while many people will be running around saying: "Where is Waldo Winchester?"

And if enough people in this town get to running around saying where is So-and-so, it becomes a great mystery and the newspapers has on the case and the cops has on everybody and he and

by there is so much heat in town that it is no place for a guy to be.

But what is to be done about this situation I do not know. Personally, it strikes me as very bad indeed, and while Johnny goes away to do a little telephoning, I am trying to think up some place to go where people will see me, and remember afterwards that I am there in case it is necessary for them to remember.

Finally Johnny comes back, very excited, and says: "Hey, the Dude is up at the Woodcock Inn on the Pelham Parkway, and he is sending out the word for one and all to come at once. Good-time Charley Bernstein just gets the wire and tells me. Something is doing. The rest of the mob are on their way, so let us be moving."

But here is an invitation which does not strike me as a good thing at all. The way I look at it, Dave the Dude is no company for a guy like me at this time. The chances are he either does something to Waldo Winchester already, or is getting ready to do something to him which I wish no part of.

Personally, I have nothing against newspaper guys, not even the ones who write pieces about Broadway. If Dave the Dude wishes to do something to Waldo Winchester, all right, but what is the sense of bringing outsiders into it? But the next thing I know, I am in Johnny McGowan's roadster, and he is zipping along very fast indeed, paying practically no attention to traffic lights or anything else.

As we go busting out the Concourse, I get to thinking the situation over, and I figure that Dave the Dude probably keeps thinking about Miss Billy Perry, and drinking liquor such as they sell in the Chicken Club, until finally he blows his topper. The way I look at it, only a guy who is off his nut will think of taking a newspaper guy out for an airing over a doll, when dolls are a dime a dozen in this man's town.

Still, I remember reading in the papers about a lot of different guys who are considered very sensible until they get tangled up with a doll, and maybe loving her, and the first thing anybody knows they hop out of windows, or shoot themselves, or somebody else, and I can see where even a guy like Dave the Dude may go daffy over a doll.

I can see that little Johnny McGowan is worried, too, but he does not say much, and we pull up in front of the Woodcock Inn in no time whatever, to find a lot of other cars there ahead of us,

some of which I recognize as belonging to different parties.

The Woodcock Inn is what is called a roadhouse, and is run by Big Nig Skolsky, a very nice man indeed, and a friend of everybody's. It stands back a piece off the Pelham Parkway and is a very pleasant place to go to, what with Nig having a good band and a floor show with a lot of fair-looking dolls, and everything else a man can wish for a good time. It gets a nice play from nice people, although Nig's liquor is nothing extra.

Personally, I never go there much, because I do not care for roadhouses, but it is a great spot for Dave the Dude when he is pitching parties, or even when he is only drinking singlehanded. There is a lot of racket in the joint as we drive up, and who comes out to meet us but Dave the Dude himself with a big hello. His face is very red, and he seems heated up no little, but he does not look like a guy who is meaning any harm to anybody, especially a newspaper guy.

"Come in, guys!" Dave the Dude yells. "Come right in!"

So we go in, and the place is full of people sitting at tables, or out on the floor dancing, and I see Miss Missouri Martin with all her diamonds hanging from her in different places, and Good-time Charley Bernstein, and Feet Samuels, and Tony Bertazzola, and Skeets Boliver, and Nick the Greek, and Rochester Red, and a lot of other guys and dolls from around and about.

In fact, it looks as if everybody from all the joints on Broadway are present, including Miss Billy Perry, who is all dressed up in white and is lugging a big bundle of orchids and so forth, and who is giggling and smiling and shaking hands and going on generally. And finally I see Waldo Winchester, the scribe, sitting at a ringside table all by himself, but there is nothing wrong with him as far as I can see. I mean, he seems to be all in one piece so far.

"Dave," I say to Dave the Dude, very quiet, "what is coming off here? You know a guy cannot be too careful what he does around this town, and I will hate to see you tangled up in anything right now."

"Why," Dave says, "what are you talking about? Nothing is coming off here but a wedding, and it is going to be the best wedding anybody on Broadway ever sees. We are waiting for the preacher now."

"You mean somebody is going to be married?" I ask, being now somewhat confused.

"Certainly," Dave the Dude says. "What do you think? What is the idea of a wedding, anyway?"

"Who is going to be married?" I ask.

"Nobody but Billy and the scribe," Dave says. "This is the greatest thing I ever do in my life. I run into Billy the other night and she is crying her eyes out because she loves this scribe and wishes to marry him, but it seems the scribe has nothing he can use for money. So I tell Billy to leave it to me, because you know I love her myself so much I wish to see her happy at all times, even if she has to marry to be that way.

"So I frame this wedding party, and after they are married I am going to stake them to a few G's so they can get a good running start," Dave says. "But I do not tell the scribe and I do not let Billy tell him as I wish it to be a big surprise to him. I kidnap him this afternoon and bring him out here and he is scared half to death thinking I am going to scrag him.

"In fact," Dave says, "I never see a guy so scared. He is still so scared nothing seems to cheer him up. Go over and tell him to shake himself together, because nothing but happiness for him is coming off here."

Well, I wish to say I am greatly relieved to think that Dave intends doing nothing worse to Waldo Winchester than getting him married up, so I go over to where Waldo is sitting. He certainly looks somewhat alarmed. He is all in a huddle with himself, and he has what you call a vacant stare in his eyes. I can see that he is indeed frightened, so I give him a jolly slap on the back and I say: "Congratulations, pal! Cheer up, the worst is yet to come!"

"You bet it is," Waldo Winchester says, his voice so solemn I am greatly surprised.

"You are a fine-looking bridegroom," I say. "You look as if you are at a funeral instead of a wedding. Why do you not laugh ha-ha, and maybe take a dram or two and go to cutting up some?"

"Mister," says Waldo Winchester, "my wife is not going to care for me getting married to Miss Billy Perry."

"Your wife?" I say, much astonished. "What is this you are speaking of? How can you have any wife except Miss Billy Perry? This is great foolishness."

"I know," Waldo says, very sad. "I know. But I got a wife just the same, and she is going to be very nervous when she hears about this. My wife is very strict with me. My wife does not allow me to go around marrying people. My wife is Lola Sapola, of the Rolling Sapolas, the acrobats, and I am married to her for five years. She is the strong lady who juggles the other four people in the act. My wife just gets back from a year's tour of the Interstate time, and she is at the Marx Hotel right this minute. I am upset by this proposition."

"Does Miss Billy Perry know about this wife?" I ask.

"No," he says. "No. She thinks I am single-o."

"But why do you not tell Dave the Dude you are already married when he brings you out here to marry you off to Miss Billy Perry?" I ask. "It seems to me a newspaper guy must know it is against the law for a guy to marry several different dolls unless he is a Turk, or some such."

"Well," Waldo says, "if I tell Dave the Dude I am married after taking his doll away from him, I am quite sure Dave will be very much excited, and maybe do something harmful to my health."

Now there is much in what the guy says, to be sure. I am inclined to think, myself, that Dave will be somewhat disturbed when he learns of this situation, especially when Miss Billy Perry starts in being unhappy about it. But what is to be done I do not know, except maybe to let the wedding go on, and then when Waldo is out of reach of Dave, to put in a claim that he is insane, and that the marriage does not count. It is a sure thing I do not wish to be around when Dave the Dude hears Waldo is already married.

I am thinking that maybe I better take it on the lam out of there, when there is a great row at the door and I hear Dave the Dude yelling that the preacher arrives. He is a very nice-looking preacher, at that, though he seems somewhat surprised by the goings-on, especially when Miss Missouri Martin steps up and takes charge of him. Miss Missouri Martin tells him she is fond of preachers, and is quite used to them, because she is twice married by preachers, and twice by justices of the peace, and once by a ship's captain at sea.

By this time one and all present, except maybe myself and Waldo Winchester, and the preacher and maybe Miss Billy Perry, are somewhat corned. Waldo is still sitting at his table

looking very sad and saying "Yes" and "No" to Miss Billy Perry whenever she skips past him, for Miss Billy Perry is too much pleased up with happiness to stay long in one spot.

Dave the Dude is more corned than anybody else, because he has two or three days' running start on everybody. And when Dave the Dude is corned I wish to say that he is a very unreliable guy as to temper, and he is apt to explode right in your face any minute. But he seems to be getting a great bang out of the doings.

Well, by and by Nig Skolsky has the dance floor cleared, and then he moves out on the floor a sort of arch of very beautiful flowers. The idea seems to be that Miss Billy Perry and Waldo Winchester are to be married under this arch. I can see that Dave the Dude must put in several days planning this whole proposition, and it must cost him plenty of the old do-re-mi, especially as I see him showing Miss Missouri Martin a diamond ring as big as a cough drop.

"It is for the bride," Dave the Dude says. "The poor loogan she is marrying will never have enough dough to buy her such a rock, and she always wishes a big one. I get it off a guy who brings it in from Los Angeles. I am going to give the bride away myself in person, so how do I act, Mizzoo? I want Billy to have everything according to the book."

Well, while Miss Missouri Martin is trying to remember back to one of her weddings to tell him, I take another peek at Waldo Winchester to see how he is making out. I once see two guys go to the old warm squativoo up in Sing Sing, and I wish to say both are laughing heartily compared to Waldo Winchester at this moment.

Miss Billy Perry is sitting with him and the orchestra leader is calling his men dirty names because none of them can think of how "Oh, Promise Me" goes, when Dave the Dude yells: "Well, we are all set! Let the happy couple step forward!"

Miss Billy Perry bounces up and grabs Waldo Winchester by the arm and pulls him up out of his chair. After a peek at his face I am willing to lay six to five he does not make the arch. But he finally gets there with everybody laughing and clapping their hands, and the preacher comes forward, and Dave the Dude looks happier than I ever see him look before in his life as they all get together under the arch of flowers.

Well, all of a sudden there is a terrible racket at the front door of the Woodcock Inn, with some doll doing a lot of hollering in a deep voice that sounds like a man's, and naturally everybody turns and looks that way. The doorman, a guy by the name of Slugsy Sachs, who is a very hard man indeed, seems to be trying to keep somebody out, but pretty soon there is a heavy bump and Slugsy Sachs falls down, and in comes a doll about four feet high and five feet wide.

In fact, I never see such a wide doll. She looks all hammered down. Her face is almost as wide as her shoulders, and makes me think of a great big full moon. She comes in bounding-like, and I can see that she is all churned up about something. As she bounces in, I hear a gurgle, and I look around to see Waldo Winchester slumping down to the floor, almost dragging Miss Billy Perry with him.

Well, the wide doll walks right up to the bunch under the arch and says in a large bass voice: "Which one is Dave the Dude?"

"I am Dave the Dude," says Dave the Dude, stepping up. "What do you mean by busting in here like a walrus and gumming up our wedding?"

"So you are the guy who kidnaps my ever-loving husband to marry him off to this little red-headed pancake here, are you?" the wide doll says, looking at Dave the Dude, but pointing at Miss Billy Perry.

Well, now, calling Miss Billy Perry a pancake to Dave the Dude is a very serious proposition, and Dave the Dude gets very angry. He is usually rather polite to dolls, but you can see he does not care for the wide doll's manner whatever.

"Say, listen here," Dave the Dude says, "you better take a walk before somebody clips you. You must be drunk," he says. "Or daffy," he says. "What are you talking about, anyway?"

"You will see what I am talking about," the wide doll yells. "The guy on the floor there is my lawful husband. You probably frighten him to death, the poor dear. You kidnap him to marry this red-headed thing, and I am going to get you arrested as sure as my name is Lola Sapola, you simple-looking tramp!"

Naturally, everybody is greatly horrified at a doll using such language to Dave the Dude, because Dave is known to shoot guys for much less, but instead of doing something to the wide doll at once, Dave says: "What is this talk I hear? Who is married to

who? Get out of here!" Dave says, grabbing the wide doll's arm.

Well, she makes out as if she is going to slap Dave in the face with her left hand, and Dave naturally pulls his kisser out of the way. But instead of doing anything with her left, Lola Sapola suddenly drives her right fist smack-dab into Dave the Dude's stomach, which naturally comes forward as his face goes back.

I wish to say I see many a body punch delivered in my life, but I never see a prettier one than this. What is more, Lola Sapola steps in with the punch, so there is plenty on it.

Now a guy who eats and drinks like Dave the Dude does cannot take them so good in the stomach, so Dave goes "oof," and sits down very hard on the dance floor, and as he is sitting there he is fumbling in his pants pocket for the old equalizer, so everybody around tears for cover except Lola Sapola, and Miss Billy Perry, and Waldo Winchester.

But before he can get his pistol out, Lola Sapola reaches down and grabs Dave by the collar and hoists him to his feet. She lets go her hold on him, leaving Dave standing on his pins but teetering around somewhat, and then she drives her right hand to Dave's stomach a second time.

The punch drops Dave again, and Lola steps up to him as if she is going to give him the foot. But she only gathers up Waldo Winchester from off the floor and slings him across her shoulder like he is a sack of oats, and starts for the door. Dave the Dude sits up on the floor again and by this time he has the old equalizer in his duke.

"Only for me being a gentleman I will fill you full of slugs," he yells.

Lola Sapola never even looks back, because by this time she is petting Waldo Winchester's head and calling him loving names and saying what a shame it is for bad characters like Dave the Dude to be abusing her precious one. It all sounds to me as if Lola Sapola thinks well of Waldo Winchester.

Well, after she gets out of sight, Dave the Dude gets up off the floor and stands there looking at Miss Billy Perry, who is out to break all crying records. The rest of us come out from under cover, including the preacher, and we are wondering how mad Dave the Dude is going to be about the wedding being ruined. But Dave the Dude seems only disappointed and sad.

"Billy," he says to Miss Billy Perry, "I am mighty sorry you do

not get your wedding. All I wish for is your happiness, but I do not believe you can ever be happy with this scribe if he also has to have his lion tamer around. As Cupid I am a total bust. This is the only nice thing I ever try to do in my whole life, and it is too bad it does not come off. Maybe if you wait until he can drown her, or something—"

"Dave," says Miss Billy Perry, dropping so many tears that she seems to finally wash herself right into Dave the Dude's arms, "I will never, never be happy with such a guy as Waldo Winchester. I can see now you are the only man for me."

"Well, well, well," Dave the Dude says, cheering right up. "Where is the preacher? Bring on the preacher and let us have our wedding anyway."

I see Mr. and Mrs. Dave the Dude the other day, and they seem very happy. But you never can tell about married people, so of course I am never going to let on to Dave the Dude that I am the one who telephones Lola Sapola at the Marx Hotel, because maybe I do not do Dave any too much of a favor, at that.

THE REAL VIENNESE SCHMALZ



Budd Schulberg

HAROLD EDSON BROWN's indignation could be heard throughout the entire studio. The only thing that was louder than his voice was the sport coat on which a couple of gag men had once played a game of checkers.

It was an outrage. Here he was, Harold Edson Brown, the highest paid writer on the lot, the only Pulitzer Prize winner on contract (though that winning play had been written twenty years ago with an enthusiasm and intensity which had sickened and died before he ever reached Hollywood), the man who had juggled such themes as mother love, comradeship and sex for over ten years with-

out ever dropping a script, being denied the fattest assignment of the year.

"What d'ya mean I can't write it?" Brown demanded in that golden voice that had gilded some of the most wilted Hollywood lilies of the past decade. "I didn't do so bad with *Mardi Gras*. *At the Pole* ain't exactly a stinker either. I got range."

(Actually Harold Edson Brown was one of the town's better educated writers. Bad grammar was a luxury he took childish delight in indulging because he knew everybody else knew he knew better.)

"But you don't know Vienna," the producer repeated. "I'm going to throw a million dollars into *The Blue Danube*. I've got to have the real Vienna—the old Viennese *schmalz*."

"The real Vienna—that's right down my alley. Don't you think I've ever been to Vienna?"

"Sure. For two days. The only time you left your hotel room was when you chased that dame into the lobby. I happen to know. I was with you."

"But I'm an expert on Vienna. I didn't spend seventeen months on *The First Waltz* for nothing."

"I should say not! Not at two grand a week. But *The Blue Danube* has to make *First Waltz* look like a quickie! I want the whole picture to sway like a beautiful waltz from start to finish. It's got to be absolutely lousy with the real Viennese *schmalz*."

"And just who is going to supply this R.V.S.?" Brown asked irritably.

The producer spoke the name with the proper air of mystery. "Hannes Dreher."

"Hannes Dreher! Never even heard of him. What are his credits?"

"Myron Selznick sold him to me. He's come straight from Europe. He's written Vienna's favorite operettas for years. This picture has got to be authentic. So it's going to be written by a one hundred per cent genuine Viennese."

2

Harold Edson Brown sat at the head of the writer's table in the commissary dishing out the latest inside dope like the man-about-studio he was, when a funny little stranger edged himself into the room.

"Who's that penguin with a hat on?" asked a gag man.

Harold Edson Brown prided himself on being a one-man studio bulletin. He always knew who had just been hired and who was about to be fired. He was supposed to have an *in* with the producers. "That must be Hannes Dreher," he announced. "He's the Austrian genius they imported for *The Blue Danube*. I'll get him over."

The lunch hour was at its height and the commissary vibrated with rapid talk punctuated by the grating clatter of many plates. Hannes Dreher was still standing close to the door, like a bewildered child arriving at boarding school for the first time. His coat looked as if it had started out to be a cutaway and changed its mind, and beneath it he wore the old-fashioned white vest which gave him the penguin look. His heavy gray fedora was balanced on his head like a book. The eyes were a gentle, light watery blue, and the only weapon he had developed throughout his half century on this earth was the vagueness which drew a screen of gauze between him and the brashness of life.

As Harold Edson Brown strode toward him with his two-thousand-dollar-a-week smile and his hand outstretched in the manner that had earned him the nickname Ward-Boss of Writer's Row, Dreher shied like a horse that had been whipped.

"You must be Hannes Dreher. Glad to meetcha, boy. I'm Harold Edson Brown."

Dreher smiled at him gratefully, bringing his heels together so gently that they produced no *click*. Because he always tried to be kind, he did his best to act as if he had heard Brown's name before.

"The same gang put on the feed bag here together every day. Make yourself at home."

Dreher bowed timidly. "Dankeschön, Herr Brown, you are very nice."

As Dreher ate, Brown nudged him familiarly. "Well, kid, you're running into plenty of luck. Just between you and me and Louella O. Parsons, the boss is throwing Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy into *The Blue Danube*. Which means you grab yourself an A credit right off the bat."

"*The Blue Danube*," Dreher reflected. "Der schöne, blaue Donau." He looked out, through the window, and Brown's eyes followed, but there was nothing out there to see.

"You're in a great spot, baby," Brown continued. "We've had plenty of these Viennese horse-operas but they've always been strictly phonies. The boss tells me you're going to give it the real Viennese *schmalz*."

"The real Viennese *schmalz*," Dreher repeated with a slow smile his eyes did not reflect. "Ach, that is very hard to give, ja?"

"You sure you wouldn't kid me, Mr. Strauss?" Brown laughed. "I'll bet you do your typing in three-quarter time."

3

Brown looked in on Dreher on his way to lunch next day. "Well, how's the Beautiful Blue Danube?" he asked. "Rolling along?"

Dreher looked up from his desk wearily. He hadn't written a line all morning and there were tight lines of worry around his eyes. "Nein, nein, she moves very slow," he answered.

"Oh, you'll hit it," Brown said. "How about ducking out for a little luncheon?" As the self-appointed good-will ambassador of the writers, he had to make the screwy little foreigner feel at home. And of course it wouldn't do him any harm to be chummy with Dreher, just in case he got a sole credit on *Danube* and became a big shot.

"Dankeschön, Herr Brown," Dreher said. "But when I write I am never hungry. See, I have brought a sandwich with me."

From that moment on Brown had Dreher pegged as an all-day sucker. He couldn't figure him at all. In his ten years in the business he had seen hundreds of writers come and go, but he had never seen one take a job so hard. Believe you me, he would tell his pals, the little Austrian sausage is doing it the hard way, strictly from torture.

Brown himself was the town's champion horizontal writer. He was one of the last holdouts against the Screen Writers' Guild because he didn't believe a writer should have ethics. He had a well-developed memory and a great gift for other writers' phrases. All he ever did was stretch out on a divan between the hours of ten and five and dictate last year's story with a new twisteroo. So you could have knocked him over with a paper-clip when he found out that Dreher was checking in at eight-thirty every morning and pounding away until seven or eight at night. And he was even more flabbergasted when he got news straight from Leah of the

stenographic department that Dreher hadn't turned in a single page. Since the new efficiency move was a minimum of five pages a day, this sounded like professional hara-kiri.

Next time Brown saw the producer he couldn't resist giving Dreher a stab in the back, just a little one for luck.

"What's Dreher been doing?—Dozing on the banks of the Danube?"

But the producer only nodded like Solomon. "Give him time. A man who loves Vienna like him! For the real Viennese *schmalz*—I'm willing to wait."

4

When Brown had to stop back at his office late one night to pick up a script, he was amazed to find Dreher still plugging away, his office full of smoke, an atmosphere of desperation, his hand pushing and pulling a cigarette into his mouth in a series of twitching gestures. The floor around his typewriter was cluttered with pages he had rolled up into nervous little balls and thrown away.

"How's she coming, pal?" Brown asked.

Dreher put out the cigarette he had just lit and tried to smile the way he had heard you should in a studio, but the attempt was pretty sad. "This is the . . . how you say . . . toughest . . . story I ever wrote," he said.

"I don't get it," Brown said. "A real Viennese like you. It oughta be a cakewalk. Old Vienna in the Springtime! Waltzing in the streets! Love on the banks of the Danube! You oughta be able to write it with your eyes closed!"

Dreher closed his eyes slowly. "Ja, the Blue Danube," he sighed. "The lovely streets of Vienna—and the waltzes." He stopped short; his fingers stiffened. After too long he said, "Ach, no, it is no . . . cakewalk."

Brown perched on the edge of his desk and waved his cigar around. "How's this for an angle? I'm just thinking out loud, see, but suppose we've got a charming young Viennese student. Nelson Eddy. You know, like the *Student Prince*? Well, Nelson's in love with the barmaid, Jeanette MacDonald, only he can't marry her because he's engaged to some princess he's never seen. But Jeanette's really the princess who ran away from the castle to find *life*, only she don't want to tell Nelson because she wants to be sure he loves her—for herself, see?

"So . . . well anyway, you can pick it up from there—and how do you like this for the topper at the finish—Nelson and Jeanette doing a duet alone in a little sail boat floating down the Blue Danube, and suddenly their song is echoed by thousands of voices, and you're into a terrific number with all the lords and ladies paired off in little boats singing the Blue Danube like it's never been sung before?"

Brown built his climax at the top of his voice, emphasizing its power by thumping Dreher's chest. Dreher had tried to listen attentively. Even though he recognized Brown's angle all too well. He looked from Brown's confident face to the labored, tediously crossed-out manuscript beside his typewriter. It was bad enough for Brown to appropriate a famous old plot. But when a man begins to plagiarize his own work! For Dreher couldn't fool himself any longer. Brown's enthusiasm-coated clichés had jolted him into realizing that the story he was working on was nothing more than a feeble carbon copy of his first operetta.

"Dankeschön," he said miserably. "You are very . . . helpful."

"Aw, don't mention it, Hans. Just let the plot take care of itself." And from the door: "Just give it that real Viennese *schmalz*."

Dreher stared after him for a moment, absently shredding the cigarette he was about to light. Then he was grabbing everything he had written these last two weeks, viciously tearing it in two, flinging it in the wastebasket, and crazily twirling another blank sheet into his typewriter.

He began again, slowly, tentatively, as if every word were being wrung from it—peck, peck-peck, pause, peck-peck. The typing faltered and stopped. As he pressed his small trembling fists against his forehead, he could still hear Brown walking down the hall whistling "The Blue Danube." Then his keys beat another slow-motion staccato, until finally page after page was being torn from the roller and thrown among the heap that lay crushed on the floor.

5

Harold Edson Brown stopped looking in on Dreher after that, because he had seen the handwriting on the producer's desk. The finger was on Hannes Dreher.

"One month and I haven't seen a page," the producer grumbled to Brown. "I think he's a fake. For my money he's never even seen Vienna."

Impulsively the producer got Dreher on the phone. "I don't want any more stalling, Dreher. If you got something I can read, get it up here. If you haven't, get out. I'll give you twenty-four hours."

Next morning Dreher knocked shyly on the door and presented the producer with a manuscript the size of a telephone book. His hand trembled with strain and fatigue as he laid it on the desk. For the last twenty-four hours he hadn't even left his office. He had written faster and faster, pounding feverishly into his typewriter the words that came rushing, the most furious labor of his career, attacking his story the way Van Gogh slashed color at his canvases.

The producer fingered through Dreher's script dubiously, and only said, "I'll call you back in an hour."

An hour later when the producer told his secretary to call Mr. Dreher down again, Dreher was still sitting anxiously in his reception room.

The producer had impressed him with his club-room informality at their first meeting. Now he was barely polite, and his voice sounded crisp and anxious to get it over. "Dreher, I only had to read the first fifty pages to know it was all wrong. It's not what I wanted at all. It's got no life, no charm, it reads like a horror story. It doesn't sound as if you've ever been to Vienna. I'm afraid we'll have to close you out as of today."

By the time they were shaking hands, the producer was already getting Brown on the phone.

At the threshold Dreher's only response was to smile with amusement but no joy, and to bring his heels together in a weary *click*, as he said good-by in a soft, sad voice.

On his way out of the studio, Dreher had to pass the projection room, where they were testing sound tracks of Jeanette MacDonald singing "The Blue Danube." The lilting rhythm almost seemed to make his head sway, but the movement was mostly in his mind.

That lovely spring afternoon in Vienna. He had just finished his new play and was celebrating with friends at a sidewalk café. Over the radio had come the strains of "The Blue Danube," and just as it seemed as if the entire place was beginning to sway, the waltz was harshly cut off. Suddenly, in a nightmare, they are listening to the trembling voice of Chancellor Schuschnigg. *This day has placed us in a tragic and decisive situation . . . the German Gov-*

ernment . . . ultimatum . . . we have yielded to force . . . God protect Austria!

That had been the signal for the explosion . . . *the thunder of Nazi throats and Nazi boots along the cobblestones . . . the last night . . . full of hoarse screams futile cries the death rattle of old Vienna . . . and there was Lothar, Lothar my only son just turned twenty-one a scholarship student at the University still wearing the red-and-white ribbon of the Republic . . . my Lothar tying some clothes and books into a hasty bundle whispering: They are hunting every leader of our Fatherland Front . . . I must get out. Remembering. The mad rush to the station . . . the fear-crazed crowd fighting for places on the train . . . and the new conquerors of Vienna dragging them off . . . Then the last hope of freedom, the steamer anchored in the Danube ready to sail for Prague . . . Remembering: the small boat the muffled oars the friendly Danube the beautiful blue Danube where Lothar learned to swim . . . then the angry put-put-put-put of the motorboat full of the cruel young faces of Lothar's classmates and Lothar slipping over into the dark water diving down to leave behind the ghastly path of their searchlight . . . and the beam always flashing across the darkness to pick him out again . . . the sound of steel winging along the surface like ducks . . . the grotesque pizzicato of the bullets plunk-plunk-plunking into the river . . .*

6

Harold Edson Brown was reading Dreher's script. "You don't have to read it," the producer had told him. "Unless you want an idea of what I don't want." Brown had looked at the title *Last Waltz in Vienna* and had only meant to skim through the first couple of pages, but here he was on one-hundred-and-two, feeling every second of Dreher's last night in Vienna. For a moment the power of Dreher's script drove so deep it reached the evaporating pool of integrity buried within him. He still knew real writing when he saw it. He was going to rush up to the producer, slam this script on his desk and shout the truth. "The climax where the old musician is playing a Strauss waltz in a Viennese beer garden as the tramp of Nazi troops and the sound of their drums begins to drown him out—the old Viennese playing louder and louder as if trying to make the voice of old Vienna heard above the tumult—

until finally nothing but brown shirts and the roar of their feet, voices and martial music fills the screen and sound track—that will be one of the most terrific moments in the history of pictures!”

But when Brown finished reading he shoved the manuscript under a bunch of loose papers in his bottom drawer, violently pushing it out of his mind. He wondered if he was going to let it lie buried there forever. One of these days (maybe), when he couldn't look his fat check in the face any more, he was going to pull it out and fight for it and watch it blast his piddling little comedies off the screen.

He tilted his chair back, sprawled his feet across the desk and pulled out a bottle of whisky. What's the matter with me today? I'm getting soft, I'm sitting around mooning like a goddamned sophomore, he lashed himself as he washed ideas out of his head with a healthy slug.

At the same moment Hannes Dreher was slowly climbing off a bus in Hollywood, wondering how to tell his family that the money they were waiting for to buy their way out of Vienna might not be coming for a long, long time.

7

Harold Edson Brown took his customary place at the writers' table. He was completely recovered. He wore a smile the way a winning race horse wears a wreath.

"What's the big grin for?" the gag man asked him. "You look like the cat who just swallowed a producer."

"Better than that," Brown laughed. "Just got a new assignment. And I'm tickled to death. *The Blue Danube*."

"Don't forget to change the names of the characters from *First Waltz*," the gag man said, "so the audience won't know it's a rehash."

"Rehash hell!" Brown said. "Wait'll you hear the new angle I got on it—a twist on the *Student Prince*. I'm going to give it that real Viennese *schmalz*!"

A DRESSING ROOM SECRET



George Bernard Shaw

(From the Haymarket Theatre program of The Dark Lady of The Sonnets, 24th November 1910)

It WAS trying-on day; and the last touches were being given to the costumes for the Shakespear Ball as the wearers faced the looking-glass at the costumiers.

"It's no use," said Iago discontentedly. "I dont look right; and I dont feel right."

"I assure you, sir," said the costumier: "you are a perfect picture."

"I may look a picture," said Iago; "but I dont look the character."

"What character?" said the costumier.

"The character of Iago, of course. *My* character."

"Sir," said the costumier: "shall I tell you a secret that would ruin me if it became known that I betrayed it?"

"Has it anything to do with this dress?"

"It has everything to do with it, sir."

"Then fire away."

"Well, sir, the truth is, we cannot dress Iago in character, because he is not a character."

"Not a character! Iago not a character! Are you mad? Are you drunk? Are you hopelessly illiterate? Are you imbecile? Or are you simply blasphemous?"

"I know it seems presumptuous, sir, after so many great critics have written long chapters analyzing the character of Iago: that profound, complex, enigmatic creation of our greatest dramatic poet. But if you notice, sir, nobody has ever had to write long chapters about *my* character."

"Why on earth should they?"

"Why indeed, sir! No enigma about me. No profundity. If my character was much written about, you would be the first to suspect that I hadn't any."

"If that bust of Shakespear could speak," said Iago, severely, "it would ask to be removed at once to a suitable niche in the façade of the Shakespear Memorial National Theatre, instead of being left here to be insulted."

"Not a bit of it," said the bust of Shakespear. "As a matter of fact, I *can* speak. It is not easy for a bust to speak; but when I hear an honest man rebuked for talking common sense, even the stones would speak. And I am only plaster."

"This is a silly trick," gasped Iago, struggling with the effects of the start the Bard had given him. "You have a phonograph in that bust. You might at least have made it a blank verse phonograph."

"On my honor, sir," protested the pale costumier, all disordered, "not a word has ever passed between me and that bust—I beg pardon, me and Mr Shakespear—before this hour."

"The reason you cannot get the dress and the make-up right is very simple," said the bust. "I made a mess of Iago because villains are such infernally dull and disagreeable people that I never could go through with them. I can stand five minutes of a villain, like Don John in—in—oh, what's its name?—*you* know—the box office play with the comic constable in it. But if I had to spread a villain out and make his part a big one, I always ended, in spite of myself, by making him rather a pleasant sort of chap. I used to feel very bad about it. It was all right as long as they were doing reasonably pleasant things; but when it came to making them commit all sorts of murders and tell all sorts of lies and do all sorts of mischief, I felt ashamed. I had no right to do it."

"Surely," said Iago, "you don't call Iago a pleasant sort of chap!"

"One of the most popular characters on the stage," said the bust.

"Me!" said Iago, stupefied.

The bust nodded, and immediately fell on the floor on its nose, as the sculptor had not balanced it for nodding.

The costumier rushed forward, and, with many apologies and solicitous expressions of regret, dusted the Bard and replaced him on his pedestal, fortunately unbroken.

"I remember the play you were in," said the bust, quite undis-

turbed by its misadventure. "I let myself go on the verse: thundering good stuff it was: you could hear the souls of the people crying out in the mere sound of the lines. I didnt bother about the sense—just flung about all the splendid words I could find. Oh, it was noble, I tell you: drums and trumpets; and the Propontick and the Hellespont; and a malignant and a turbaned Turk in Aleppo; and eyes that dropt tears as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinal gum: the most impossible, far-fetched nonsense; but such music! Well, I started that play with two frightful villains, one male and one female."

"Female!" said Iago. "You forget. There is no female villain in Othello."

"I tell you theres no villain at all in it," said the immortal William. "But I started with a female villain."

"Who?" said the costumier.

"Desdemona, of course," replied the Bard. "I had a tremendous notion of a supersubtle and utterly corrupt Venetian lady who was to drive Othello to despair by betraying him. It's all in the first act. But I weakened on it. She turned amiable on my hands, in spite of me. Besides, I saw that it wasnt necessary—that I could get a far more smashing effect by making her quite innocent. I yielded to that temptation: I never could resist an effect. It was a sin against human nature; and I was well paid out; for the change turned the play into a farce."

"A farce!" exclaimed Iago and the costumier simultaneously, unable to believe their ears. "Othello a farce!"

"Nothing else," said the bust dogmatically. "You think a farce is a play in which some funny rough-and-tumble makes the people laugh. Thats only your ignorance. What I call a farce is a play in which the misunderstandings are not natural but mechanical. By making Desdemona a decent poor devil of an honest woman, and Othello a really superior sort of man, I took away all natural reason for his jealousy. To make the situation natural I must either have made her a bad woman as I originally intended, or him a jealous, treacherous, selfish man, like Leontes in *The Tale*. But I couldnt belittle Othello in that way; so, like a fool, I belittled him the other way by making him the dupe of a farcical trick with a handkerchief that wouldnt have held water off the stage for five minutes. Thats why the play is no use with a thoughtful audience. It's nothing but wanton mischief and murder. I apologize for it; though, by

Jingo! I should like to see any of your modern chaps write anything half so good."

"I always said that Emilia was the real part for the leading lady," said the costumier.

"But you didnt change your mind about me," pleaded Iago.

"Yes I did," said Shakespear. "I started on you with a quite clear notion of drawing the most detestable sort of man I know: a fellow who goes in for being frank and genial, unpretentious and second rate, content to be a satellite of men with more style, but who is loathsomely coarse, and has that stupid sort of selfishness that makes a man incapable of understanding the mischief his dirty tricks may do, or refraining from them if there is the most wretched trifle to be gained by them. But my contempt and loathing for the creature—what was worse, the intense boredom of him—beat me before I got into the second act. The really true and natural things he said were so sickeningly coarse that I couldnt go on fouling my play with them. He began to be clever and witty in spite of me. Then it was all up. It was Richard III over again. I made him a humorous dog. I went further: I gave him my own divine contempt for the follies of mankind and for himself, instead of his own proper infernal envy of man's divinity. That sort of thing was always happening to me. Some plays it improved; but it knocked the bottom out of Othello. It doesnt amuse really sensible people to see a woman strangled by mistake. Of course some people would go anywhere to see a woman strangled, mistake or no mistake; but such riff-raff are no use to me, though their money is as good as anyone else's."

The bust, whose powers of conversation were beginning to alarm the costumier, hard pressed as he was for time, was about to proceed when the door flew open and Lady Macbeth rushed in. As it happened, she was Iago's wife; so the costumier did not think it necessary to remind her that this was the gentlemen's dressing room. Besides, she was a person of exalted social station; and he was so afraid of her that he did not even venture to shut the door lest such an action might seem to imply a rebuke to her for leaving it open.

"I feel quite sure this dress is all wrong," she said. "They keep telling me I'm a perfect picture; but I dont feel a bit like Lady Macbeth."

"Heaven forbid you should, madam!" said the costumier. "We can change your appearance, but not your nature."

"Nonsense!" said the lady: "my nature changes with every new dress I put on. Goodness Gracious, whats that?" she exclaimed, as the bust chuckled approvingly.

"It's the bust," said Iago. "He talks like one o'clock. I really believe it's the old man himself."

"Rubbish!" said the lady. "A bust cant talk."

"Yes it can," said Shakespear. "I am talking; and I am a bust."

"But I tell you you cant," said the lady: "it's not good sense."

"Well, stop me if you can," said Shakespear. "Nobody ever could in Bess's time."

"Nothing will ever make me believe it," said the lady. "It's mere medieval superstition. But I put it to you, do I look in this dress as if I could commit a murder?"

"Dont worry about it," said the Bard. "You are another of my failures. I meant Lady Mac to be something really awful; but she turned into my wife, who never committed a murder in her life—at least not a quick one."

"Your wife! Ann Hathaway!! Was she like Lady Macbeth?"

"Very," said Shakespear, with conviction. "If you notice, Lady Macbeth has only one consistent characteristic, which is, that she thinks everything her husband does is wrong and that she can do it better. If I'd ever murdered anybody she'd have bullied me for making a mess of it and gone upstairs to improve on it herself. Whenever we gave a party, she apologized to the company for my behavior. Apart from that, I defy you to find any sort of sense in Lady Macbeth. I couldnt conceive anybody murdering a man like that. All I could do when it came to the point was just to brazen it out that she did it, and then give her a little touch of nature or two—from Ann—to make people believe she was real."

"I am disillusioned, disenchanted, disgusted," said the lady. "You might at least have held your tongue about it until after the Ball."

"You ought to think the better of me for it," said the bust. "I was really a gentle creature. It was so awful to be born about ten times as clever as anyone else—to like people and yet to have to despise their vanities and illusions. People are such fools, even the most likeable ones, as far as brains go. I wasnt cruel enough to enjoy my superiority."

"Such conceit!" said the lady, turning up her nose.

"Whats a man to do?" said the Bard. "Do you suppose I could go round pretending to be an ordinary person?"

"I believe you have no conscience," said the lady. "It has often been noticed."

"Conscience!" cried the bust. "Why, it spoilt my best character. I started to write a play about Henry V. I wanted to shew him in his dissolute youth; and I planned a very remarkable character, a sort of Hamlet sowing his wild oats, to be always with the Prince, pointing the moral and adorning the tale—excuse the anachronism: Dr Johnson, I believe: the only man that ever wrote anything sensible about me. Poin was the name of this paragon. Well, if youll believe me, I had hardly got well into the play when a wretched super whom I intended for a cowardly footpad just to come on in a couple of scenes to rob some merchant and then be robbed himself by the Prince and Poin—a creature of absolutely no importance—suddenly turned into a magnificent reincarnation of Silenus, a monumental comic part. He killed Poin; he killed the whole plan of the play. I revelled in him; wallowed in him; made a delightful little circle of disreputable people for him to move and shine in. I felt sure that no matter how my other characters might go back on me, he never would. But I reckoned without my conscience. One evening, as I was walking through Eastcheap with a young friend (a young man with his life before him), I passed a fat old man, half drunk, leering at a woman who ought to have been young but wasnt. The next moment my conscience was saying in my ear: 'William: is this funny?' I preached at my young friend until he pretended he had an appointment and left me. Then I went home and spoilt the end of the play. I didnt do it well. I couldnt do it right. But I had to make that old man perish miserably; and I had to hang his wretched parasites or throw them into the gutter and the hospital. One should think before one begins things of this sort. By the way, would you mind shutting the door? I am catching cold."

"So sorry," said the lady. "My fault." And she ran to the door and shut it before the costumier could anticipate her.

Too late.

"I am going to sneeze," said the bust; "and I dont know that I can."

With an effort it succeeded just a little in retracting its nostrils

and screwing up its eyes. A fearful explosion followed. Then the bust lay in fragments on the floor.

It never spoke again.

HOUSE OF PAIN



Irwin Shaw

"TELL HER Mr. Bloomer wants to see her," Philip said, holding his hat, standing straight before the elegant, white-handed hotel clerk.

"It's a Mr. Bloomer, Miss Gerry," the hotel clerk said elegantly, looking through Philip's plain, clean face, far across the rich lobby.

Philip heard the famous voice rise and fall in the receiver. "Who the hell is Mr. Bloomer?" the famous, sweet voice said.

Philip moved his shoulders uncomfortably in his overcoat. His country-boy cars, sticking out from his rough hair, reddened.

"I heard that," he said. "Tell her my name is Philip Bloomer and I wrote a play called *The House of Pain*."

"It's a Mr. Philip Bloomer," the clerk said languidly, "and he says he wrote a play called *A House of Pain*."

"Did he come all the way up here to tell me that?" the deep rich voice boomed in the receiver. "Tell him that's dandy."

"Let me talk to her, please." Philip grabbed the receiver from the clerk's pale hand. "Hello," he said, his voice shaking in embarrassment. "This is Philip Bloomer."

"How do you do, Mr. Bloomer?" the voice said with charm.

"The thing is, Miss Gerry, this play I wrote," Philip tried to find the subject, the object, the predicate before she hung up, "*The House of Pain*."

"The clerk said *A House of Pain*, Mr. Bloomer."

"He's wrong," Philip said.

"He's a very stupid man, that clerk," the voice said. "I've told him so many times."

"I went to Mr. Wilkes' office," Philip said desperately, "and they said you still had the script."

"What script?" Miss Gerry asked.

"*The House of Pain*," Philip cried, sweating. "When I brought it into Mr. Wilkes' office I suggested that you play the leading part and they sent it to you. Now, you see, somebody at the Theatre Guild wants to see the script, and you've had it for two months already, so I thought you mightn't mind letting me have it."

There was a pause, an intake of breath at the other end of the wire. "Won't you come up, Mr. Bloomer?" Miss Gerry said, her voice chaste but inviting.

"Yes, ma'am," Philip said.

"1205, sir," the clerk said, delicately taking the phone from Philip's hands and placing it softly on its pedestal.

In the elevator Philip looked anxiously at his reflection in the mirror, arranged his tie, tried to smooth down his hair. The truth was he looked like a farm boy, a dairy-hand who had perhaps gone to agricultural school for two years. As far as possible he tried to avoid meeting theatre people because he knew nobody would believe that anybody who looked like him could write plays.

He got out of the elevator and went down the softly carpeted hall to 1205. There was a sheet of paper stuck in a clip on the metal door. He braced himself and rang the bell.

Miss Adele Gerry opened the door herself. She stood there, tall, dark-haired, perfumed, womanly, in an afternoon dress that showed a square yard of bosom. Her eyes held the same dark fire that had commanded admiring attention on many stages from Brooks Atkinson, from Mantle, from John Mason Brown. She stood there, her hand lightly on the doorknob, her hair swept up simply, her head a little to one side, looking speculatively at Philip Bloomer in the hallway.

"I'm Mr. Bloomer," Philip said.

"Won't you come in?" Her voice was sweet, simple, direct, fitted exactly to the task of allaying the nervousness of farm boys and dairy-hands.

"There's a note for you on the door," Philip said, glad of one sentence, at least, with which to get inside.

"Oh, thank you," she said, taking it.

"Probably a letter from some secret admirer," Philip said, with a smile, suddenly resolved to be gallant, to fight the farm boy, destroy the dairy-hand.

Miss Gerry took the sheet of paper over to the window, scanned it, her eyes close to it nearsightedly, her whole body beautifully intent on the written word.

"It's a menu," she said, tossing it on a table. "They have lamb stew tonight."

Philip closed his eyes for a moment, hoping that when he opened them, Miss Gerry, the room, the hotel would have disappeared.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Bloomer?" Miss Gerry said.

He opened his eyes and marched across the room and sat up-right on a little gilt chair. Miss Gerry arranged herself beautifully on a sofa, her hand outstretched along the back, the fingers dangling, the legs girlishly tucked in.

"You know, Mr. Bloomer," Miss Gerry said, her voice charmingly playful, "you don't look like a playwright at all."

"I know," Philip said, gloomily.

"You look so healthy." She laughed.

"I know."

"But you *are* a playwright?" She leaned forward intimately, and Philip religiously kept his eyes away from her bosom. This, he suddenly realized, had become the great problem of the interview.

"Oh, yes," he said, looking steadfastly over her shoulder. "Yes, indeed. As I told you over the phone, I came up for my play."

"*The House of Pain.*" She shook her head musingly. "A lovely title. Such a strange title for such a healthy-looking boy."

"Yes, ma'am," Philip said, rigorously holding his head steady, his gaze up.

"It was so good of you to think of me for it," Miss Gerry said, leaning forward even farther, her eyes liquid and grateful enough to project to the third row, balcony. "I've practically been in retirement for three years. I thought nobody even remembered Adele Gerry any more."

"Oh, no," Philip said, gallantly. "I remembered you." He saw that this was bad, but was sure that anything else he might add would be worse.

"The Theatre Guild is going to do your play, Mr. Bloomer?" Miss Gerry asked fondly.

"Oh, no. I didn't say that. I said somebody I knew up there

thought it might not be a bad idea to send it around, and since you'd had the play for two months . . ."

Some of the interest fled from Miss Gerry's deep eyes. "I haven't a copy of your play, Mr. Bloomer. My director, Mr. Lawrence Wilkes, has it." She smiled beautifully at him, although the wrinkles showed clearly then. "I was interested in seeing you. I like to keep an eye on the new blood of the theatre."

"Thank you," Philip mumbled, feeling somehow exalted. Miss Gerry beamed at him and he felt his eyes, unable to withstand the full glory of her glance, sinking to her bosom. "Mr. Wilkes," he said loudly. "I've seen many of his plays. You were wonderful in his plays. He's a wonderful director."

"He has his points," Miss Gerry said coldly. "But he has limitations. Grave limitations. It is the tragedy of the American theatre that there is no man operating in it today who does not suffer from grave limitations."

"Yes," Philip said.

"Tell me about your play, Mr. Bloomer. Tell me about the part you had in mind for me." She recrossed her legs comfortably, as though preparing for a long session on the sofa.

"Well," Philip said, "it's about a boardinghouse. A low, dreary, miserable boardinghouse with bad plumbing and poor devils who can't pay the rent. That sort of thing."

Miss Gerry said nothing.

"The presiding genius of this boardinghouse," Philip went on, "is a slatternly, tyrannical, scheming, harsh woman. I modeled her on my aunt, who keeps a boardinghouse."

"How old is she?" Miss Gerry asked, her voice small and flat.

"Who? My aunt?"

"The woman in the play."

"Forty-five." Philip got up and started to stride up and down the room as he talked of his play. "She's continually snooping around, listening at keyholes, piecing together the tragedies of her boarders from overheard snatches, fighting with her family, fighting with—" He stopped. "Why, Miss Gerry," he said. "Miss Gerry . . ."

She was bent over on the couch and the tears were dropping slowly and bitterly from her eyes.

"That man," she wept, "that man . . ." She jumped up and swept across to the phone, dialed a number. Unheeded, the tears

streamed down through the mascara, eye-shadow, rouge, powder, in dark channels. "That man," she wept, "that man . . ."

Philip backed instinctively against a wall between a table and a chest, his hands spread coldly out behind him. Silently he stood there, like a man awaiting an attack.

"Lawrence!" she cried into the phone. "I'm glad you were home. There's a young man up here and he's offered me a part in his play." The tears coursed bitterly down the dark channels on her cheeks. "Do you know what part it is? I'm going to tell you and then I'm going to throw the young man right the hell out of this hotel!"

Philip cowered against the wall.

"Keep quiet, Lawrence!" Miss Gerry was shouting. "I've listened to your smooth excuses long enough. A woman of forty-five," she wept, her mouth close to the phone, "a bitter, slatternly, ugly, hateful boardinghouse keeper who listens at keyholes and fights with her family." Miss Gerry was half bent over in grief now, and she gripped the telephone desperately and clumsily in her two hands. Because her tears were too much for her, she listened and Philip heard a man's voice talking quickly, but soothingly, over the phone.

Finally, disregarding the urgent voice in the receiver, Miss Gerry stood straight. "Mr. Bloomer," she said, her teeth closing savagely over the name, "please tell me why you thought of me for this rich and glamorous role."

Philip braced himself weakly against the wall between the chest and the table. "You see," he said, his voice high and boyish and forlorn, "I saw you in two plays."

"Shut up, for the love of God!" Miss Gerry called into the phone. Then she looked up and with a cold smile, spoke to Philip. "What plays, Mr. Bloomer?"

"*Sun in the East*," Philip croaked, "and *Take the Hindmost*."

A new and deeper flood of tears formed in her dark eyes. "Lawrence," she sobbed into the phone. "Do you know why he's offering me this part? He saw me in two plays. Your two great successes. He saw me playing a hag of sixty in *Sun in the East* and he saw me playing the mother of a goddamned brood of Irish hoodlums in *Take the Hindmost*. You've ruined me, Lawrence, you've ruined me."

Philip slipped out of his niche against the wall and walked

quickly over to the window and looked out. Twelve stories, his mind registered automatically.

"Everybody's seen me in those parts. Everybody! Now, whenever there's a play with a mother, a crone in it, they say, 'Call up Adele Gerry.' I'm a woman in the full flush of my powers. I should be playing Candida, Hedda, Joan, and I'm everybody's candidate for the hero's old mother! Boardinghouse keepers in children's first efforts!"

Philip winced, looking down at Madison Avenue.

"Who did this to me?" Miss Gerry's tones were full, round, tragic. "Who did it? Who cajoled, pleaded, begged, drove me into those two miserable plays? Lawrence Wilkes! Lawrence Wilkes can claim the credit for ruining the magnificent career of a great actress. The famous Lawrence Wilkes, who fooled me into playing a mother at the age of thirty-three!"

Philip hunched his shoulders as the deep, famous voice crowded the room with sound.

"And now you wonder," even at the phone, her wide gesture of shoulder and arm was sharp with irony, "now you wonder why I won't marry you. Send me flowers, send me books, send me tickets to the theatre, write me letters telling me you don't care if I go out with other men. From now on I'm going out with the entire garrison of Governor's Island! I'll eat dinner next to you with a different man every night! I hate you, I hate you, Larry, I hate you . . ."

Her sobs finally conquered her. She let the phone drop heedlessly, walked slowly and with pain over to a deep chair and sank into it, damp, bedraggled, undone, like a sorrowing child.

Philip breathed deeply and turned around. "I'm sorry," he said hoarsely.

Miss Gerry waved her hand wearily. "It's not your fault. I've been getting this for three years. You're the agent of events, that's all."

"Thank you," Philip said gratefully.

"A young woman like me," Miss Gerry moaned, looking like a little girl, miserable in the deep chair. "I'll never get a decent part. Never. Never. Mothers! That man has done me in. Don't ever get mixed up with that man. He's an egotistic maniac. He would crucify his grandmother for a second-act curtain." She wiped her eyes in a general smear of cosmetics. "He wants me to marry him." She laughed horribly.

"I'm so sorry," Philip said, feeling finally, because that was all he could say, like a farm boy, a dairy-hand. "I'm so, so sorry."

"He says go up and get your script," Miss Gerry said. "He lives across the street in the Chatham. Just call up from the desk and he'll bring it down."

"Thank you, Miss Gerry," Philip said.

"Come here," she said, the tears departing. He walked slowly over to her and she pulled his head down to her bosom and kissed his forehead and held his ears with her two hands. "You're a nice, clean, stupid boy," she said. "I'm glad to see there's a new crop springing up. Go."

Philip limped to the door, turned there, meaning to say something, saw Adele Gerry sitting in her chair, looking blankly at the floor, with her face a ruin of sorrow and mascara and age. Philip softly opened the door and softly closed it behind him.

He went across to the street, breathing the cold air deeply, and called Lawrence Wilkes on the phone. Philip recognized Wilkes when he got out of the elevator with a copy of *The House of Pain* under his arm. Wilkes was neatly and beautifully dressed and had a hit running and had just been to a barber, but his face was worn and tortured and weary, like the faces of the people in the newsreels who have just escaped an air-raid, but who do not hope to escape the next.

"Mr. Wilkes," Philip said softly.

Wilkes looked at Philip and smiled and put his head forgivingly and humorously to one side. "Young man," he said, "in the theatre you must learn one thing. Never tell an actress what type of part you think she can play." And he gave Philip *The House of Pain* and turned and went back into the elevator. Philip watched the door close on his well-tailored, tortured back, then sprang out into the street and fled across town to the Theatre Guild.

THE PARROT



Vincent Sheean

JANE MORRELL was so agitated that for a moment she forgot whether it was Southern Chivalry or the Yankee Postmistress that she was obliged to do next. She set herself right by consulting the program she had stuck into the mirror of her dressing table. It was the Yankee Postmistress.

"Wal, I never!" she said to the mirror, adopting already the tone and measure of her next impersonation. "Chuck!"

She shuddered slightly at the sound of her own voice. How many absurdities, how many foolish disasters, had this habit of impersonation brought upon her! What did she care about the Yankee Postmistress, after all? But there they were, outside in the theatre, all those people, waiting for a Yankee Postmistress. And they had paid well for their seats. She would have to be out there in a moment, saying "Wal, I never!" and scratching her chin, or they would all presently rise and go home, demanding the return of their money. She would supply the Yankee Postmistress on schedule: she had never failed them yet. But she would have liked to be sure whether Chuck was there or not, in the audience.

She had his note before her on the dressing table.

DEAR JANE [it said], I want to talk to you tonight if it is possible. I hope you will forgive me for this and for everything else. Let me see you after your performance is over anyway. I must talk to you tonight.

CHUCK.

She buckled her belt about her, straightened the front of her dress and put out her cigarette. "Tell the usher," she said to her maid, "to tell the gentleman who wrote the note that I shall be

glad to see him after the performance." She folded the note up carefully and put it into her handbag. She wondered if Chuck were in the audience. She supposed he was. But perhaps he was only hanging about the theatre, waiting for her performance to be finished. He had always hated her work. "Parrot," he had called her. "Parrot." Well, perhaps he was right. Perhaps she had always been a parrot.

But here she was in front of a large audience, holding them quiet and fascinated by the swift surceness of her words. They did not believe she was a Yankee Postmistress. She did not believe she was a Yankee Postmistress. But they were dazzled by the sights and sounds she made for them with her hands, her expressive eyes and mouth and her voice—particularly her voice. With her voice she could do anything—anything, that is, except keep Chuck. It was her voice that had driven him away. He couldn't even tell what her natural accent was, he had said. Her voice defeated him: it spoke in a million ways, and they all came from the larynx. She could be queen or courtesan or peasant with her voice, but she could not be herself. She had not even tried for years. That is, since Chuck.

Here on the stage alone, with an audience darkling at her feet, she could feel strong enough to do without herself—without the self which Chuck wanted, at any rate—which she thought perhaps (does one ever know? she asked) did not exist. She had enough selves without that one. But Chuck had never been reasonable. He thought because he built objects out of iron and stone that everything else must have a structural, inner solidity; he could never realize how unlike herself she always was—how two o'clock flashed into three, and nine into ten, like colors spinning on a wheel, so that she could not stop the changing or try to stabilize the prism. It had nothing to do with sincerity, she felt sure. She had always been sincere with an infinitely variable sincerity—now the Yankee Postmistress and then Southern Chivalry, but always sincere. She was sure (taking her bows here, as she always did, with an erect and friendly impersonality) that Chuck would have understood her better if he had had more patience with her work. He had always been impatient with her work—her "art," she had generally called it in those days. Once, in one of those brief but bitter quarrels that had preceded the end, he had told her that her work had all the aesthetic significance of a trained flea's. "You ought to be in vaudeville, between the acrobats and the ventriloquist," he said.

She remembered every moment of that scene, in which she had been very haughty indeed. "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," he had also called her. How one could be simultaneously a trained flea and Lady Clara Vere de Vere was difficult to understand, but there seemed no limit to the things Chuck thought she could be. If she abandoned haughtiness in favor of a tender sympathy he would say: "For God's sake, don't! I can't bear the G string."

At other moments he would accuse her of being coy or romantic or frivolous; always as if there were in her case a deliberate intent in the expression of these attributes that robbed them of their share in the universal coyness, romanticism or frivolity. He really did not seem to believe anything she said or did. How he could have loved such an incredible composition she often wondered. But he had loved her, whatever he might say now. She could remember hundreds of proofs of that love—so grateful and soft, like furs on a winter's night, and so good for her work. She had learned new accents from Chuck. Half of the best of her work would never have existed without him, she thought. What he called the "G string" had been vastly enriched by his passage. Even tonight (she was now doing the Little Match Girl, which she herself preferred to the Yankee Postmistress, it was so brave, so sad!) those three old women in the upper box on the left were weeping at her brave G string. She had learned a great deal from Chuck. And to have his love again if he meant to offer it (or even if he didn't), she would do anything he asked. She would be herself if she could find any sort of satisfactory self to be. Probably he had been right, at least in part, when he supposed her to be always unreal. She had been pretty unreal ten years ago, even on the stage. Once, in one of those dreadful last interviews, she had said to Chuck as disdainfully as she could: "I dare say what you mean is that I'm always acting." And he had responded: "Acting? Acting? You're not even acting! You're only imitating—always imitating—you're a parrot!" Infinitely disagreeable, he could be (the Little Match Girl, having elicited the last tear from the old ladies in the upper left box, here departed from the stage).

But those disagreeable scenes, which lingered so sharply in the memory now, had been very few and all toward the end. For the most part he had been like food and heat to her; dear Chuck—she could never have gone on without him—warm, necessary Chuck. She wondered how he would be now. The ironic grin and the

dark, loose hair, she supposed, would have been made a little more respectable in ten years. She hoped he did not wear high collars and talk about the stock market. But he had made money, as she knew from Cousin Mamie, and money sometimes encompasses these wonders. It had not, she felt, done so much to her. To be sure, she had not made a fortune, but she lived very comfortably, and her vogue showed no signs of diminishing. She was in fact highly successful, even if she was a parrot (she smiled archly into the mirror and then corrected the expression into a becoming wistfulness). If Chuck came back to her—if he came back—she would be no expense to him—no trouble . . .

But her heart had given a bound, and she could scarcely breathe. What was it, then? If Chuck came back . . . ! All her veins were filled with the possibility. Love, she thought, love! The dried leaves of her life were blown up, and the spring was beneath them, where Chuck had left it years ago. This was love. He would come back, and she would be happy—ten years could be forgotten—she was young and could be in love. She was only thirty-seven. Her eyes and her cheeks in the mirror assured her of love. Damn the Little Match Girl! she exulted. I'll show him I can be as real as any woman in love—as real as spring and a swift ride over the hills. How real this was, how blessedly, beautifully real! She did love Chuck, and she would tell him so at once, quite simply—no, not simply; he would not believe it; but passionately, fervently, with every ounce of the force of the spring within her. He would have to believe this; it was so true that it almost shocked her in its intensity. He would say, "Jenny darling," and she could then be enveloped by his warmth and his necessity, after ten years.

There had been a sort of hard, businesslike asceticism in her life, she knew. She had worked too much, she had been too single of purpose. That was it. She had never had time for love—since Chuck. But now, if Chuck came back . . .

It was time to go on the stage again for her last number. She half wished she had not chosen this for her last thing tonight. It was a brilliant example of her work, in which she talked to five imaginary personages in as many languages and made them all live through a little drama of her own contriving. As she went from one side of the stage to the other, running through her brilliant scales of expression, language and voice, she wondered if Chuck were out

there saying "Parrot!" and "Trained flea!" at her across the foot-lights. She could not see him although she swept her glance over row after row in orchestra and balcony. Now that the moment of realization was over and she knew that she loved him again (or still), she had time to hope that he would not be forever hostile to her work. After all there were not many women living who could do what she could do: hold a stage alone, give it depth and breadth and life, populate it with her imagination and her voice. Chuck had always been unfair to her work. Oh, she knew it well enough; it was jealousy in its essence, this rigid animosity. But if, in spite of her best logic, Chuck proved obstinate she was prepared to love him just the same, she realized, and to argue no more.

For as she dressed in front of the mirror Jane Morrell perceived that here was her best remaining chance of life. She was thirty-seven now; she was no longer in her very first youth; she had no gift for interesting men; she had worked too hard, too earnestly; she had no lightness at all. It was extraordinary to think what a small part love had played in her experience. After Chuck there had been nothing.

But her veins were distended again with the same anxiety, the same apprehension, of love. Her fingers were not steady as they arranged her flowers and straightened her hat. She *must* not fail, she thought suddenly, and there was an ice of agony over her for a second: she could not fail. If Chuck came back, only to be lost again—but she could not see through such blackness. It would have to be all right, because she would be as pure and ardent as a village girl in her first love affair. Even Chuck would have to believe her. The ice and darkness were gone now. She felt confident again, but curiously shy, as she went to the door.

He was waiting for her.

"Chuck!" she said in a low voice and put out both her hands. He did not look very different. She was conscious of an effort to keep from putting her arms about him: the maid and an electrician were standing there, interested. "Let's go home, to my flat," she said to him, "and get some food. It's quiet at my place."

"It's good to see you, Jenny," he said. He was looking at her in a way which made her spine and her heart intractable. She had not experienced such sensations for years—if, indeed, ever. The oddity of the feeling was gone in a moment, and she could enjoy it. She

took his arm and whispered, "Dear Chuck!" They went outside and got into a taxi.

"Oh, so much to say, and where to begin!" she said. They sat in opposite corners of the taxi, and he looked at the back of the driver's neck. She put her hand out and found his. "What's happened to you, Chuck?" she asked. Her voice was very low and tender. Then she remembered that she must not listen to her own voice: he had always hated the way she listened to her own voice. She would force herself to listen only to his, she resolved—if she could, and if he would ever speak.

"You've married and grown rich and distinguished," she said. "Cousin Mamie has kept me informed so far. But the details? And what are you like now, Chuck dear?"

"About as always," he said. "And so are you, Jenny. My wife died, you know. And I'm neither so distinguished nor so rich as you think Cousin Mamie said I was. I'm just about as always."

"That's good," she said. "I wouldn't have you different. Were you in the audience tonight? I wondered all during the last part of the program."

He stirred slightly and put his free hand to his head.

"No, I wasn't in the theatre at all," he answered at last. "I wanted to see—you, that's all."

She pressed his hand.

"Dear Chuck," she said. He was motionless, dark and formidable there in his corner, without identity except when he spoke or when some street light reached his head and reassured her with the familiar profile. They fell into a silence that lasted until the taxicab drew up before her door. It seemed to her that she was afraid—afraid of listening to her own voice, perhaps. She would not admit to herself that what she feared might be failure, that failure with Chuck which she had determined was not possible tonight. But as they got out of the motor she was aware of another new sensation, an overwhelming terror. It sat upon her chest so that she would not have dared try to speak. It was exactly the sensation she had heard described as stage fright, which no stage had ever been able to evoke in her. Before the elevator had reached her floor she knew it for what it was, the panic fear of failure with Chuck. That was it, and she must drive it out. She *would* not fail.

"Shall we get some food in the kitchen?" she asked gaily as they came into the flat. "No maids, no servants: we forage for our-

selves." She recognized the tone as that of the New York Society Girl in one of her most celebrated sketches. But perhaps Chuck had never heard that sketch. And she would try not to listen to her own voice. "There'll be eggs anyway," she said.

They scrambled some eggs, and he sat and looked at her. His hair was still loose and dark, his eyes rather disconcerting. She could not help listening to the sound of her own voice; she did not know how not to listen to it any more. If she must choose a voice, then, she decided, let it be the gayest one. She could not bear the silence which filled the little kitchen when her efforts ceased.

"Haven't you ever come to see and hear me in all these years, you ogre?" she demanded. "I've looked for you in audiences always and never have seen you. I wish you had heard me tonight. I think even you would be forced to admit that I've improved."

"Oh yes," Chuck said, "you've improved. I used to go to hear you every time I could—until the last year or two. You've improved wonderfully. I used to go sometimes with Sue—with my wife. But I haven't wanted to go much, lately."

"I know," she told him. "I know exactly what you think of my work. Jane Morrell *als Künstlerin* strikes you as something just a little lower than a juggler, wot? No soul—that's it—no spirit. It's pretty, but is it art? Darling, if you only knew how well I remember your tirades against me you'd appreciate my joy in hearing you admit that I've improved."

"The very best juggler," he said savagely, "is still a juggler. But don't let's get started on that."

"All right, lamb," she said in the midst of one of those gurgling laughs which she could always control at will. "*Le meilleur joueur d'échecs n'est qu'un*—but we won't discuss my art. It does pay the rent, however; there's always that to remember. And if you've finished your eggs we'll go into the drawing room and light the fire. It's always laid; admirable household I run."

She could not endure the falsehood of her own voice. She did not want to be gay. She wanted to be silent and loved. But the voice went on; she heard it doing its brilliant best, roulades and exercises, like a singer's. And he looked at her with that still, hurt look, too penetrating and too strange for the old Chuck. If the conversation continued like this, she thought, she would go mad and talk forever, whether Chuck came or went, in the same un-

bearable gaiety of words and accent which had nothing to do with either of them. But she must not let it go on like this; she must not fail. He was sitting in an armchair at one side of the fire, she in another on the other side. They might sit all night like this if she could not break down her own unwanted defense. She got up and brought an enormous cushion from the divan, threw it on the hearthrug at his feet and sat there with her head only a few inches from his knee.

"Let's talk sensibly, Chuck," she said in a new voice, a determinedly simple voice. "Tell me why you wanted to see me."

He put his hand out on her head listlessly, but he did not look at her. He was looking only at the new fire.

"You've probably guessed," he said. There was a dead, hopeless sound to his words. "I was thinking—I was thinking of us. As we used to be. Wondering if we could—but you see it won't do."

"Why not?" she asked. She was whispering now. Her veins told her that victory was near. "Why not?" she repeated.

"It's just as it always was," he said, still not looking at her. "I can't believe you. I can't believe anything you say or do. I only love you when I'm away from you. It won't do at all."

"Oh, Chuck! Such foolish reasoning! You *do* love me then?"

"I don't know," he said. "I suppose I do, in a way. But I'm discouraged, to put it very inadequately, when I see you. During the seven years of my marriage I used to go to see your performances at fairly regular intervals, just to keep myself from longing for you. When I hadn't seen you for some months I loved you again. When I saw you on the stage and heard you mimicking every single human emotion and never feeling one of them—well, I was cured. For a time. And lately I've wanted to see you again. That's all."

"That's all?" she echoed. "But that can't be all! I don't suppose you've ever thought of what it meant to me, all this! I loved you once, and since I'm made the way I am there it is—there it still is! What about me?"

"Oh, you!" he said nervously, brutally, getting up from his chair. "There isn't any you, Jenny."

"Chuck!" she moaned—but she must not listen to her own voice!

"I shouldn't have come here at all, but it serves me right," he said from the other end of the room. "I might have known. You're

exactly the same as you were. If you start playing a scene at me I shall go at once. Perhaps it would be better to go anyway. But I did want to see you."

"What beastly egotists—" But here she stopped in time: it was a line from one of her sketches, and the rest of it was "men are." Profound as it was, the reflection would have been fatal at this point. Chuck must have heard her say it scores of times, in the same wounded but petulant tone, on the stage.

"Come here and sit down," she said quietly. "Let's try to be adults. You're childish and morbid. You've got me so mixed up in your mind with my work, which you don't like, and with the characters I play in my work, that you can't see straight where I'm concerned."

He came back, sat down and took her head in his hands to look at her.

"Oh, Chuck darling!" she said, looking at him candidly, purely. "I'm all right. The only questions involved are whether you love me and whether I love you."

"But who's to tell that?" he asked. His hands left her head and fell to the arms of his chair. "I can't believe you, ever, Jenny, and it's hopeless! If you could see and hear yourself now, in the fire-light, face upturned, the maiden's prayer . . . Oh, God!"

She changed her position and caught both of his hands quickly before he could rise.

"Let me talk to you," she said. "Let me talk to you, and you will believe me. I swear I'll forget everything I've ever learned and talk to you absolutely honestly—"

"But you can't!" he interrupted. "We've been through all this so often. . . . I was a fool to think anything could have changed in ten years. I'd better go, Jenny. When I want to see you again I can go with the rest of the audience."

"Oh, darling, don't!" she cried. Her voice was hurt; she could feel the tears, surprising tears, starting at their springs. "Let me be truthful and tell you everything, and you'll have to see that it's all right. You've got to let me tell you, Chuck!" Her arms were across the front of his chair, and he could not have risen if he had tried. Her voice caught on a sob in her throat, and it hurt her to speak; even then she knew that she was lost. "This is honest and real, anyhow, and I mean for you to believe me. I may have been a parrot before, but I'm not a parrot now—I've never loved anybody

but you, and I'll give up my work or anything you like if you want me to—"

He was trying to get up, to move her arms from the chair. "I can't stand this, I tell you I can't stand it!" he said. She clung to the chair, and her throat was aching. "You've got to!" she said. She did not know her own voice. "You've always wanted me to be what you call real, and now that I'm real for once you can't go away. What do you suppose these ten years have been for me? Don't you suppose I'd rather have been in Sue's place than making parrot sounds on a stage? What do you think I care about success—parrot success? Chuck—Chuck!"

How long she cried out like this at his feet she never knew. Thirty-seven years of her life had gathered and burst in this tempest before him. She was lost in it for once, while her voice no longer reached her own ears, and her eyes and throat were blind. When she looked at him at last and could see, he was standing at the door. He had put on his overcoat and held his hat and gloves in one hand while his other rested on the doorknob. Only his hair was still loose and dark and his face looked as if he had heard her.

"I told you before, Jenny," he said, "that you had improved a great deal. Good night."

When the door closed behind him she fell over the hearthrug and the enormous cushion with her face buried in her arms. A long moan came from her and filled the room with its moaning. Her ear's habit caught it, and as she lay there, motionless, she repeated it. The third one sounded almost like the first—except for thirty-seven years less of life—and she knew that she would not lose it afterwards.

A TRIP TO HOLLYWOOD

*Frank Sullivan*

"HOLLYWOOD! All out!"

The voice of the conductor rang through the crack flier which had borne us westward.

Was it possible that I was really in Hollywood, the Citadel of Glamour? I pinched myself. It was.

A young woman stood beside me in the aisle. Probably one of that army that descends upon the film capital each year seeking the bubble reputation even in the camera's eye.

"You have, perhaps, come to Hollywood to break into the movies?" I ventured to ask her.

She looked at me dreamily.

"I have come to Hollywood to see Clark Gable," she said in a reverent voice. "I stuck up a filling station in Tonawanda to get the money. I had to do it. I was desperate."

"I know, and understand," I told her gently.

The young lady said her name was Twistle—Miss Millicent Twistle.

"You may call me Milly, if you like, or Twiss," she said. "Have you come all the way to Hollywood to see Clark too?"

"I wouldn't mind seeing him, of course," I said, "only I must confess I want to see more of Hollywood than him."

The Gable-maddened maiden looked at me with an expression of contempt not unmixed with disdain, as if to say, what more could anyone wish to see than Clark Gable.

"Don't misunderstand me," I said. "I yield to no one in my admiration for Mr. Gable, but, after all, he is only one phase of this magic place. I want to see all the phases. I want to see Malibu Beach. I want to see a yes man in action, and I would like to crash

one of those famous Hollywood parties where they play practical jokes and push you into the swimming pool. I also want to see the Brown Derby and Joan Crawford."

"Do you?" came a silvery voice behind us.

I turned, and there stood absolutely the most ravishingly beautiful woman I had ever in all my born days beheld. She smiled. Our eyes met. Somehow we both—knew. I clasped her in my arms.

"I have always known that someday I would—find you," I said brokenly.

"I knew that someday you would—come," she said simply.

"No, no, no, no, no," came an irritated, weary voice. I looked behind us and saw a portly gentleman seated in a chair labeled "Director." He seemed to be supervising the operations of several cameras which were trained on my radiant vis-à-vis and myself.

"You said that as though you were asking her to pass the catsup," he rebuked. "Man alive, put some fire into it! You love her. You're crazy for her. Come on now, once again. Ready! Set! Camera! Go!"

Came the strains of a violin playing "Love's Old Sweet Song." Tears came to my eyes. Something in me snapped. Claspings the young lady to me again, I said chokingly, "Oh, my loved one, I always knew that someday I would—find you."

"I knew that someday you would—come," she said simply.

"That's more like it," applauded the director. "That was titanic. You were only colossal before. . . . Come on, boys."

They took their cameras and marched away.

"Your face is familiar," I said to my loved one. "Haven't we met before?"

"I am Joan Crawford," said the vision simply.

Ten minutes in Hollywood and Joan Crawford already clasped in my arms!

"Could this happen anyplace else?" I asked Twiss, over Joan's shoulder.

"It certainly beats the Dutch," Twiss admitted.

"Who is that you're talking to back there?" demanded Joan.

"It's a little girl who thumbed her way three thousand miles to feast her eyes on Clark Gable. Miss Crawford, do you suppose you can fix it so she can see Mr. Gable?"

"I certainly can," said Miss Crawford. "She's just in time. Clark

is granting audience at three this afternoon to all the girls who have traveled from afar for that purpose."

"Where?" cried Twiss frantically.

"In the Hollywood Bowl," said Miss Crawford, "but you better start right now or you may not get a seat."

Miss Twistle was off like the Burlington Zephyr.

"Have you lunched?" said Miss Crawford.

I hadn't.

"Then let's go to the Brown Derby," she suggested.

"Oh, the Brown Derby. Good."

Happy in our new-found love, we went to the Brown Derby. Four or five thousand movie stars were having lunch, of crackers and milk, at the famous restaurant, and there was a busy hum of conversation from which one's ear could occasionally pick such Hollywood colloquialisms as "Terrific," "Montage," "Dub in," "Not the type," "Yes, Mr. Warner," and "So they jumped her salary from \$75 a week to \$3500."

Miss Crawford took me to a table where sat twelve young women, each one of them absolutely the most ravishingly beautiful vision I had ever seen.

"These are the Misses Loy, Davies, Young, Lombard, Shearer, West, Del Rio, Sullavan, Francis, Hopkins, Temple and Hepburn," said Miss Crawford.

"How do you do, Miss Loy, Miss Davies, Miss—" I began.

"Oh, call us Myrna, Marion, Loretta, Carole, Norma, Mae, Dolores, Margaret, Kay, Miriam, Shirley and Katharine," said Myrna, Marion, Loretta, Carole, and so on.

Our eyes met—a total of twenty-six eyes—and somehow, by that ineffable magic that Cupid weaves, we—knew. It was love at first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth sights, not necessarily in the order named.

"I always knew that somehow, someday, I would—find you," I said brokenly.

"We always knew that you would—come," they said simply.

"Speech!" cried Miss West. The others took up the cry. I rose, took a sip of water and cleared my throat:

"Madame Chairman, Ladies: I am no speechmaker, as you know. What few words I have to say to you here today will not take long. If you want flowery speeches and sweet nothings, I am

afraid you will have to go to one more versed in that sort of thing than I am. All I can say is that I love you with a love that is as eternal as the snows on yonder alp, and that life without you would be unthinkable, unendurable. All that I am and have, I offer you. Will you cast your lot with mine? Will you walk with me down life's pathway, hand in hand, secure in the knowledge that our love is all that matters? In other words, will you be mine? All in favor say 'aye.' All opposed, 'nay.' The ayes have it. Is there any unfinished business? Any committee reports?"

There were none.

We fourteen, including Miss Crawford, were very happy in our new-found love. They promised to do all in their power to help me see the Hollywood of my dreams.

"You look hungry," said Miss Loy hospitably. "Have something to eat. Here's the waitress."

I looked up, and there stood absolutely the most ravishingly glamorous creature I had ever seen in my life.

"Waitress?" I gasped, in a kind of daze from the impact of her loveliness on my already beauty-befuddled senses. "You a waitress?"

"Yes," said the waitress simply, smiling down at me with great sad brown eyes.

I rose and clasped her in my arms.

"I always knew that someday, and so on," I said.

"I knew that someday, and so on," she said brokenly. "Be careful of my tray."

"Tray. Tray. What care we twain for trays? Let the world and its trays go by. Our love is all that matters."

"I have always dreamed that someday, somehow, a golden knight would come riding through clouds of sapphire, coral and ebony," said the beautiful slavey.

"Oh, my darling," I said. "Why do you tremble? What kind of pie have you got?"

"Huckleberry, raspberry, lemon meringue, custard—"

"Ah, I don't want pie," I said fiercely. "I don't need pie. With you at my side, I no longer fear destiny. But why aren't you in the movies?"

"I'm too beautiful," she said sadly. "The law of diminishing returns got me. I'm so beautiful I don't photograph well. Mr. Goldwyn, Mr. Van Dyke, Mr. Lubitsch, Mr. Mayer, Mr. Mile-

stone, Mr. Selznick and Mr. Capra tried to figure every possible way to lop off enough looks to put me over, but no use. I remained a raving, tearing beauty."

"You poor kid!"

"Oh, Hollywood's full of us," she sighed. "Butterflies broken on the wheel of fortune. Unsuccessful eye-fuls doomed to a life of waiting."

"You said you wanted to see a picture being made," one of the girls said to me. "They're shooting a love scene with Diane d'Amour on the Metro-Paramount-Warner lot across the street this afternoon. Why don't you run over?"

Diane d'Amour! The great French actress. Most colossal Hollywood sensation since Garbo's debut. Would I like to see her playing a love scene? I grabbed at the chance. Over at the M-P-W lot, I found Miss d'Amour sitting on the set, surrounded by klieg lights, supervisors, yes men, yes maids, four screen lovers—one limbering up and three in reserve—and an anxious-looking director.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am for this opportunity of seeing Miss d'Amour in action," I told the director. "Look at her. What marvelous restraint!"

"That's not restraint," said the director. "She isn't acting."

"Not acting? The great d'Amour not acting? I thought she was always acting. What's the trouble?"

"I don't know," said he gloomily. "She just don't seem to come to a boil today."

"Maybe the part isn't worthy of her genius," I suggested indignantly.

"Same part she's always had. She's the wickedest woman in Paris and has had a quarrel with her lover. She's supposed to be pleading with him; she's supposed to say, 'Jacques, won't you please try to—understand?' No use. We've shot her a hundred times and she still says it as if Jacques were a wooden Indian."

"Have you tried music?" I asked, recalling from my own recent experience how music can inspire one to heights of dramatic power one has hitherto considered one's self incapable of reaching. "The violin, for instance?"

"I've tried violins," said the director, "and I've tried lutes. I've tried rebecs, harps, lyres, zithers, banjos and the dulcimer."

"Have you tried the viola da gamba," I asked, "or the xanor-phica?"

"Yes, and the double bassoon and the contrafagotto, not to speak of the pitch pipe, the ophicleide, the oboe and the doodle-sack. Yesterday I hired the entire Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra to come out here and play, and they couldn't budge her. I'm beginning to doubt if Stokowski, leading the massed Boston, Philadelphia and New York symphonies, together with the Chicago Fire Department band, could start her to acting. She says she don't feel it—here."

He indicated a point just below the left lapel of his coat.

Miss d'Amour heard all this, glanced haughtily yet beseechingly at the director. Even in adversity she was lovely. She had that Gallic chic which is the mark of your true Parisienne.

"Have you tried the comb?" I asked, as an idea struck me.

"The comb?"

"The old-fashioned comb with tissue paper over it. Probably I'm a fool rushing in, but I don't think I've lost my old skill at getting a tune out of a comb. Care to have me try it on her?"

"No," said the director. Then he thumped a table.

"By George, why not?" he said desperately. "What harm can it do?"

"None that time cannot heal," I assured him.

The director seemed to be infused with new hope suddenly.

"All right," he megaphoned. "Who's the lover on duty? Watson? . . . All right, Watson; get in there and fight now. Give Miss d'Amour all you got. . . . Miss d'Amour, we're going to try it once again, with a new kind of music. Please give Mr. Watson all you got. All set?"

I adjusted the comb and slid a lip up and down it a few times to get the feel of it. Then I winked a signal to the director.

"One, two, three! Camera!" he shouted, and I started playing "Love's Old Sweet Song."

Miss d'Amour looked startled for a few seconds, and then an amazing thing happened. Something seemed to come over her. She began to give. The comb had broken the log jam! Softly, pleadingly, she said, "Jacques, won't you please try to—understand?"

Never in the history of the movies had the classic line been rendered with such consummate artistry.

"Diane, that was terrific," the director enthused.

Miss d'Amour hurried over, rubbing off her make-up excitedly.

"Who was that playing on the comb?" she demanded.

I acknowledged the soft impeachment. She clasped me in her arms.

"I never had anything get me so," she said. "When I was a kid back in Attleboro, I used to go on straw rides with a boy I was terribly struck on, and he used to play that tune on the comb as we glided through the golden October evenings. I haven't heard it played for ages, especially on the comb. It took me right back. You're a dear. How about dinner with me tonight, just for two?"

Dinner with the great d'Amour, toast of half Paris!

"Oh, Miss d'Amour, that sounds marvelous," I said.

"It will be," she assured me cordially.

"I can't thank you enough, old man, for helping us out of that dilemma," said the director. He scribbled something on a piece of paper and handed it to me. "Just present this at the cashier's office as you go out, and they will give you \$3500 and a percentage of the gross."

I had heard of the fabulous Hollywood salaries, but this was the first time I had actually received one.

Well, the rest of the afternoon was a rapid succession of parties at the palatial bungalows of one or another glamorous movie star. Social life in Hollywood is bizarre. Guests have a habit of moving on from one party to another, sometimes taking the entire party with them. One star may be giving a party and may suddenly get the idea of taking all fifty of her guests to another star's party. That party may go on to another party in toto, like a snowball going downhill. So that what starts as a friendly call on, let us say, Joan Crawford by two or three pals in search of a dish of tea and a crumpet, may eventually turn into a costume ball for twelve hundred at the Countess di Frasso's. In fact, usually does. The custom makes Hollywood social life unpredictable, but adds zest to it.

I couldn't for the life of me remember a tenth of the glamorous people I met that afternoon. The time passed so quickly that, before I realized it, it was five minutes to nine. Fortunately, anticipating some such emergency, I had put on my evening clothes and white tie underneath my mufti that morning, so I knew it

would be the work of a second to molt the outer suit and present myself at Miss d'Amour's suitably clad.

"I've got to run," I apologized to my hostess of the moment. "I'm due at Diane d'Amour's for dinner at nine o'clock."

"A splendid idea!" exclaimed a star who was loitering near the caviar bin. "We'll all go to d'Amour's for dinner."

This was rather embarrassing.

"I'm terribly sorry, but I—uh—I believe Miss d'Amour said it was to be a dinner for—uh—two."

"Oh, that's all right. We don't stand on formality in Hollywood. There's always room for a hundred more," said another star, bristling with ermine.

But there happened to be about two hundred more. Well, it wasn't my funeral, so I made no further comment. Away we went, two hundred strong, to Diane d'Amour's palatial Beverly Hills estate, a château imported stone by stone from Normandy, Devonshire and Spain.

Miss d'Amour herself met us at the third gatekeeper's lodge. She was simply yet richly costumed in a cloth-of-gold dress with several ropes of perfectly matched pearls draped about that classic ivory column called her neck.

"So sorry to be late, Miss d'Amour," I apologized.

"Why, you're not late, you're early," she soothed. "I was just going in to dress. I've been puttering in the garden."

"In your Sunday clothes!"

"Sunday clothes? These old rags my Sunday clothes?"

She gave a light laugh, and one thought of larks singing at sunrise in a French garden.

"Why, these are my gardening clothes," she explained. "I love to putter in the garden. I've been spading truffles. Nothing rests me so much after a hard day's work at the studio as a putter with a truffle in the garden."

"But those magnificent pearls," I could not help saying.

"These old pearls magnificent!" Again she laughed, and it was like silver chimes caressed by a Provençal zephyr. "These are just my puttering pearls. I picked 'em up from a Gaekwar in India. They get in the way sometimes, but they keep me warm. The garden is rather drafty and I am subject to colds."

"Miss d'Amour, I'm terribly sorry to have brought along so many extra guests. It really wasn't my idea."

"How many are there?" she asked, surveying the line of expensive limousines still filing into the grounds.

"About two hundred, I'm afraid."

"Two hundred. Pooh! What's two hundred extra guests for dinner at Well Kum Inn? Don't you think that's a cute name for my shack here?"

"If you must slander such a magnificent château, imported stone by stone from Tuscany, Sussex and Wales, by calling it a shack," I said, with a bow. "But I thought you said dinner for two."

"Sure I did. For two hundred. You know the old saying: Two hundred's company, three hundred's a crowd."

She seized a gold megaphone and addressed the throng:

"Make yourself at home, folks. There'll be a tun of sherry right out, so you can wet your whistles. Excuse me now while I dress."

She explained later that she used the gold megaphone ordinarily for summoning her maids when they were at the other end of her boudoir, which is seven hundred and fifty feet long.

D'Amour reappeared shortly, this time a vision in cloth of platinum, with ropes of diamonds.

"I'm going to give you a treat," she said, tapping me with her fan. "I hear you want to see a Hollywood swimming party."

She reached an elegantly shod foot for a button which lay concealed in the grass, and pressed it five times. Five butlers responded. "We shall swim this evening, Meadows," she said.

"Very good, madame. Which swimming pool does madame wish filled?" said the dignified old fellow who seemed to be the head Meadows.

"All four of them, of course," said Miss d'Amour, with an imperious wave of the hand.

Four swimming pools! I'm in Hollywood, all right, I thought.

"Very good, madame. Does madame wish the pools to be filled with the usual—"

"With the usual champagne, of course. You know very well I do."

Swimming pools filled with champagne! Whew, I thought, for I am an accomplished whew-thinker.

"Diane, dear—"

That voice! I recognized it instantly. It had come to me from the silver screen so often. It was Carmencita Passion, the glamorous film star, of course.

"Diane, dear, I'd love to take a dip, but my doctor says I absolutely must not swim in champagne. Could you—"

"Oh, Carmencita, dear, I forgot," said Miss d'Amour. . . . "Meadows, Miss Passion is on the wagon. Fill her up a pool of iced tea. . . . With lemon, dear?"

"Yes, darling."

"How many lumps of sugar?"

"No sugar, thank you."

"Perhaps it's just as well, dear," said Miss d'Amour sweetly, "although, you know, they tell me plump women are coming back in style."

"How nice for you, dear," said Miss Passion, also sweetly.

After dinner, which was a simple meal of *pâté de foie gras*, since most of the folks in the picture business must watch their calories carefully, we adjourned to the swimming pools for our dip.

I was walking with Morrison Turnsour, the director.

"Imagine having four swimming pools to your name," I said admiringly.

"Confidentially," he said, "I believe d'Amour would gladly exchange all four of them for the one La Passion has."

"You mean?" I said simply.

"Passion and D'Amour are great rivals," he explained. "When D'Amour got her fourth pool, Passion knew she must top D'Amour in order to save face. Saving face is very important here. Passion determined to have something different, a pool that would be like no other pool in Hollywood. For a while she was stumped, because there is every known kind of swimming pool in Hollywood, including one lined with fur. Then La Passion got a brilliant idea. All the swimming pools are on land, she figured. So she decided to build one in the ocean. She bought a twenty-acre tract of water forty-five miles off shore in the Pacific, and built herself a cork pool out there. Said she wanted to have some place where she could get away from It All. D'Amour was fit to be tied. Passion's one simple little cork pool out there in the briny deep made her four onyx pools look ostentatious. Yet I understand it costs Passion seven dollars a quart to have fresh water hauled out to her pool, as against the four and a half dollars d'Amour pays for her champagne, wholesale."

"Did Passion save her face?" I asked.

"Yes, but D'Amour said it was only for a rainy day."

With that someone tripped me and pushed me into the pool, fully clad. I found out later it was Vince Barnett who pushed me. Vince Barnett is the chief ribber, or perpetrator of practical jokes, in Hollywood. I considered it quite an honor to have been pushed in by the chief ribber.

Everyone who was anyone in Hollywood was in the pools. Some wore bathing suits and some had been pushed in, fully dressed, as a joke. It was a beautiful sight. Handsome men and glamorous women, ornaments of the silver screen, swimming about, laughing and joking and spouting iridescent jets of sparkling Burgundy into the air. The magnates were there too—the producers and bankers and big shots of the financial end of the industry. You could tell the magnates because they floated. The champagne bubbled and effervesced and broke into millions of tiny jewels as the colored lights played upon them. Although I had never been in the Orient, I knew instinctively, by some age-old racial stirring, that this was none other than a scene of Oriental splendor.

I began to have a pleasant sense of well-being, and in a burst of enthusiasm, struck out for the middle of the pool, but collided with a young fellow before I had gone a yard. He was a magnificent figure of a lad, with long hair, white tie and bathing trunks.

"Excuse me, friend, but aren't you Johnny Weissmuller?" I asked.

He said he was.

"Your face is familiar too," he added.

"I know it," I apologized. "Maybe you will think it fresh of me, Mr. Weissmuller, but I have never been in Hollywood before. I am here to see the sights, and I have read so much in the papers about the famous arguments that you and Mrs. Weissmuller have, that I was hoping to see one before I left."

"I'll see if I can fix it," Mr. Weissmuller said pleasantly. . . . "Lupe! Lupe!"

Absolutely the most ravishingly beautiful girl I had ever seen in my life swam up.

"What you want now, John-ee?" she exploded. "Always you call, 'Lupe, Lupe, Lupe.' Why do you not leave me alone?"

"This gentleman wanted to see you and me have a little spat."

"I am beezy sweeming," stormed Miss Velez. "I have no time to spat wiz you."

"I was only trying to be agreeable and do this gentleman a fa—"

"Always I must have ze spat wiz you," cried Lupe. "I am tired of having ze spat. I will not have ze spat."

"This man is a stranger in Hollywood and he wanted to see—"

"I do not care. I weell not spat. You hear, John-ee?"

"I guess you'll spat if I want you to," said Mr. W., his dander aroused.

Lupe said she wouldn't. He said she would. She said she wouldn't, and the fight was on. She swam away, and Johnny chased her.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Weissmuller," I called after him.

By this time I was getting a little tired treading champagne, so I struck out for the edge of the pool and pulled myself up. There, standing on the edge of the pool, stood absolutely the most ravishingly beautiful girl I had ever seen in my life, and I was just about to push her in, fully clad, as a joke, when I saw, to my astonishment, that she was my old friend of the morning, Milly Twistle.

"Twiss!"

"You?"

"How did you get here? Did you see Clark Gable?"

"No," said Milly bitterly.

"What happened?"

"The gatekeepers wouldn't let me in the Bowl."

"Why not?"

"He was seeing only the girls whose names began with U, today. It seems there is such a mob he has to see 'em one letter a day. Wouldn't it be my luck that he would see my letter the day before I get here? Now, I either wait twenty-five days until he gets around to T again, or I go home. I tried to pull a fast one on the gatekeeper. I told him my name was Unglefinger, but he just laughed, and said, 'Where's your birth certificate?' I'm so mad I could cry. I'd o' had to walk back from the Bowl, too, if I hadn't o' got a lift from this gentleman here."

She pointed to a handsome chap in evening clothes.

It was Clark Gable.

I introduced her to him, then pushed them both into the pool, fully clad, as a joke.

I got home, dog tired but lark happy, at four in the morning. I figured I had seen about as much of Hollywood as anyone could

see in one day. And it had all been just as exciting and glamorous as I had hoped, if not more so.

Around noontime Claudette Colbert, Luise Rainer, Jeanette MacDonald, Minnie Mouse, Rochelle Hudson, Merle Oberon and Ginger Rogers telephoned and asked me to stay over for a few more days, but I said no.

"It's been swell here and you've all been perfectly dandy to me," I said, "but I guess I'm about ready to make tracks for back home. I like to visit Hollywood," I said, "but I wouldn't love here if you gave me the place."

THE MACBETH MURDER MYSTERY



James Thurber

"IT WAS a stupid mistake to make," said the American woman I had met at my hotel in the English lake country, "but it was on the counter with the other Penguin books—the little sixpenny ones, you know, with the paper covers—and I supposed of course it was a detective story. All the others were detective stories. I'd read all the others, so I bought this one without really looking at it carefully. You can imagine how mad I was when I found it was Shakespeare." I murmured something sympathetically. "I don't see why the Penguin-books people had to get out Shakespeare plays in the same size and everything as the detective stories," went on my companion. "I think they have different-colored jackets," I said. "Well, I didn't notice that," she said. "Anyway, I got real comfy in bed that night and all ready to read a good mystery story and here I had *The Tragedy of Macbeth*—a book for high-school students. Like *Ivanhoe*," "Or *Lorna Doone*," I said. "Exactly," said the American lady. "And I was just crazy for a good Agatha Christie, or something. Hercule Poirot is my

favorite detective." "Is he the rabbit one?" I asked. "Oh, no," said my crime-fiction expert. "He's the Belgian one. You're thinking of Mr. Pinkerton, the one that helps Inspector Bull. He's good, too."

Over her second cup of tea my companion began to tell the plot of a detective story that had fooled her completely—it seems it was the old family doctor all the time. But I cut in on her. "Tell me," I said. "Did you read *Macbeth*?" "I *had* to read it," she said. "There wasn't a scrap of anything else to read in the whole room." "Did you like it?" I asked. "No, I did not," she said, decisively. "In the first place, I don't think for a moment that Macbeth did it." I looked at her blankly. "Did what?" I asked. "I don't think for a moment that he killed the King," she said. "I don't think the Macbeth woman was mixed up in it, either. You suspect them the most, of course, but those are the ones that are never guilty—or shouldn't be, anyway." "I'm afraid," I began, "that I—" "But don't you see?" said the American lady. "It would spoil everything if you could figure out right away who did it. Shakespeare was too smart for that. I've read that people never *have* figured out *Hamlet*, so it isn't likely Shakespeare would have made *Macbeth* as simple as it seems." I thought this over while I filled my pipe. "Who do you suspect?" I asked, suddenly. "Macduff," she said, promptly. "Good God!" I whispered, softly.

"Oh Macduff did it, all right," said the murder specialist. "Hercule Poirot would have got him easily." "How did you figure it out?" I demanded. "Well," she said, "I didn't right away. At first I suspected Banquo. And then, of course, he was the second person killed. That was good right in there, that part. The person you suspect of the first murder should always be the second victim." "Is that so?" I murmured. "Oh, yes," said my informant. "They have to keep surprising you. Well, after the second murder I didn't know *who* the killer was for a while." "How about Malcolm and Donalbain, the King's sons?" I asked. "As I remember it, they fled right after the first murder. That looks suspicious." "Too suspicious," said the American lady. "Much too suspicious. When they flee, they're never guilty. You can count on that." "I believe," I said, "I'll have a brandy," and I summoned the waiter. My companion leaned toward me, her eyes bright, her teacup quivering. "Do you know who discovered Duncan's body?" she demanded.

I said I was sorry, but I had forgotten. "Macduff discovers it," she said, slipping into the historical present. "Then he comes running downstairs and shouts, 'Confusion has broke open the Lord's anointed temple' and 'Sacrilegious murder has made his masterpiece' and on and on like that." The good lady tapped me on the knee. "All that stuff was rehearsed," she said. "You wouldn't say a lot of stuff like that, offhand, would you—if you had found a body?" She fixed me with a glittering eye. "I—" I began. "You're right!" she said. "You wouldn't! Unless you had practiced it in advance. 'My God there's a body in here!' is what an innocent man would say." She sat back with a confident glare.

I thought for a while. "But what do you make of the Third Murderer?" I asked. "You know, the Third Murderer has puzzled *Macbeth* scholars for three hundred years." "That's because they never thought of Macduff," said the American lady. "It was Macduff, I'm certain. You couldn't have one of the victims murdered by two ordinary thugs—the murderer always has to be somebody important." "But what about the banquet scene?" I asked, after a moment. "How do you account for Macbeth's guilty actions there, when Banquo's ghost came in and sat in his chair?" The lady leaned forward and tapped me on the knee again. "There wasn't any ghost," she said. "A big, strong man like that doesn't go around seeing ghosts—especially in a brightly lighted banquet hall with dozens of people around. Macbeth was *shielding somebody*!" "Who was he shielding?" I asked. "Mrs. Macbeth, of course," she said. "He thought she did it and he was going to take the rap himself. The husband always does that when the wife is suspected." "But what," I demanded, "about the sleepwalking scene, then?" "The same thing, only the other way around," said my companion. "That time *she* was shielding *him*. She wasn't asleep at all. Do you remember where it says, 'Enter Lady Macbeth with a taper'?" "Yes," I said. "Well, people who walk in their sleep *never carry lights*!" said my fellow-traveler. "They have a second sight. Did you ever hear of a sleepwalker carrying a light?" "No," I said, "I never did." "Well, then, she wasn't asleep. She was acting guilty to shield Macbeth." "I think," I said, "I'll have another brandy," and I called the waiter. When he brought it, I drank it rapidly and rose to go. "I believe," I said, "that you have got hold of something. Would you lend me that *Macbeth*? I'd

like to look it over tonight. I don't feel, somehow, as if I'd ever really read it." "I'll get it for you," she said. "But you'll find that I am right."

I read the play over carefully that night, and the next morning, after breakfast, I sought out the American woman. She was on the putting green, and I came up behind her silently and took her arm. She gave an exclamation. "Could I see you alone?" I asked, in a low voice. She nodded cautiously and followed me to a secluded spot. "You've found out something?" she breathed. "I've found out," I said, triumphantly, "the name of the murderer!" "You mean it wasn't Macduff?" she said. "Macduff is as innocent of those murders," I said, "as Macbeth and the Macbeth woman." I opened the copy of the play, which I had with me, and turned to Act II, Scene 2. "Here," I said, "you will see where Lady Macbeth says, 'I laid their daggers ready. He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it.' Do you see?" "No," said the American woman, bluntly, "I don't." "But it's simple!" I exclaimed. "I wonder I didn't see it years ago. The reason Duncan resembled Lady Macbeth's father as he slept is that *it actually was her father!*" "Good God!" breathed my companion, softly. "Lady Macbeth's father killed the King," I said, "and, hearing someone coming, thrust the body under the bed and crawled into the bed himself." "But," said the lady, "you can't have a murderer who only appears in the story once. You can't have that." "I know that," I said, and I turned to Act II, Scene 4. "It says here, 'Enter Ross with an old Man.' Now, that old man is never identified and it is my contention he was old Mr. Macbeth, whose ambition it was to make his daughter Queen. There you have your motive." "But even then," cried the American lady, "he's still a minor character!" "Not," I said, gleefully, "when you realize that he was also *one of the weird sisters in disguise!*" "You mean one of the three witches?" "Precisely," I said. "Listen to this speech of the old man's. 'On Tuesday last, a falcon towering in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.' Who does that sound like?" "It sounds like the way the three witches talk," said my companion, reluctantly. "Precisely!" I said again. "Well," said the American woman, "maybe you're right, but—" "I'm sure I am," I said. "And do you know what I'm going to do

now?" "No," she said. "What?" "Buy a copy of *Hamlet*," I said, "and solve *that*!" My companion's eye brightened. "Then," she said, "you don't think Hamlet did it?" "I am," I said, "absolutely positive he didn't." "But who," she demanded, "do you suspect?" I looked at her cryptically. "Everybody," I said, and disappeared into a small grove of trees as silently as I had come.

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